

**North Alabama International Trade Association
Globally Competitive Community
Education/Workforce Development Focus Group
May 23, 2005 - 10:30 a.m.
Sheraton Conference Room – Huntsville, Alabama**

The Education/Workforce Development Focus Group met in breakout session during the NAITA Globally Competitive Community meeting on May 23, 2005 at the Sheraton in Huntsville Alabama. A list of those attending is attached.

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Mary Yarbrough who welcomed everyone and asked for round-the-table introductions.

Following the introductions, Ms. Yarbrough introduced meeting facilitator Dr. Jennie Robinson, Management Training and Consulting with Personal Best Training and Development. Dr. Yarbrough told the group that the purpose of the meeting is to identify the top 5 issues in North Alabama in the areas of education and workforce development training and, if there is time, to develop some potential solutions for those issues.

Dr. Robinson echoed that saying the immediate outcome of the meeting is to identify the top five issues in the area of training and retaining a qualified workforce in the region and look for possible solutions for those issues. Following the meeting a taskforce will be developed to work on those issues.

Dr. Robinson asked those present to break out into five groups and each one of those groups to identify workforce issues. A list of all identified issues was compiled, duplicates were identified and the group I voted on the top five overall issues. Issues identified follow.

Group I

- 1) The lack of adequate career counseling in k-12 leads to underemployed workers and there is a lack of education programs to serve this population
- 2) Society undervalues the trades and other nonacademic skill training
- 3) Lack of awareness and knowledge of world and cultural diversity
- 4) Learned helplessness – dependent society
- 5) Lack of community awareness of workforce development issues and duplication of effort

Group II

- 1) Lack of community collaboration and partnership between business and education on workforce development issues
- 2) Lack of an effective method of changing the mindset of parents, students and educators regarding the value of career/technical education

- 3) Improved communication is needed regarding the workforce development programs already available in the region
- 4) A balance is needed between high growth and existing industries
- 5) An effort needs to be made to ensure that basic skills are not lost in the mix. A balance is needed between basic skills, soft skills and advanced technical skill training

Group III

- 1) Develop a better partnership (greater collaboration) between workforce development efforts
- 2) Better teacher preparation is needed so teachers have some first-hand knowledge regarding skills needed in the workplace
- 3) Better education is needed in terms of globalization – there needs to be an international focus in teaching in k-12 including greater emphasis on foreign language studies
- 4) Need increased funding for upgrading and training the existing workforce
- 5) There is a need for a youth voice, a systematic method of including youth in the workforce development process

Group IV

- 1) Need for effective one-stop career centers statewide
- 2) Better teacher development with greater awareness of workforce development programs (a requirement for business experience should be built into the teacher certification process)
- 3) Revamping guidance counselor role and increasing the requirement for math and science program in k-12 (must be done at the Department of Education level – remove the emphasis on the 4x4 curriculum)
- 4) Better integration of Hispanics into the workforce and bridging the language barriers
- 5) Marketing viable career opportunities to students and adults

Group V

- 1) Greater involvement of business and industry in workforce development efforts
- 2) More effective recruiting of high school students into workforce training programs (change the mindset that trades are not valued)
- 3) Improve work ethic among local and regional workforce
- 4) Overall communication regarding workforce development efforts
- 5) Retention and competitiveness regarding skilled workers among business and industry (turf wars between business/industry over skilled workers)

Following the small group sessions all issues were posted and those present were asked to vote on the five most critical workforce development/education issues facing North Alabama. Those issues were:

- 1) The need for business and industry to take ownership of workforce development issues
- 2) The need to balance soft skill and technical skill training in all workforce development programs
- 3) The need for greater collaboration and communication among workforce development entities
- 4) The need to strengthen k-12 education (especially in the area of math, science and career technical education)
- 5) The need for effective marketing to change the negative mindset regarding career/technical education among students, parents and educators

Dr. Robinson asked the small groups to reform for brief discussions of potential solutions for the top five identified issues. Many of these discussions centered on the mindset issue, how to convince community to value skill training and create a commitment to workforce development. Dr. Yarbrough said that these efforts are all part of one circle: better communication, stronger commitment, and business and educators all working together.

State Representative Neal Morrison said the State of Alabama is moving toward greater emphasis on Career/Technical under Dr. Roy Johnson, Chancellor of Post Secondary.

Teresa Walker with Kappler, Inc. said she has attended many meetings with business and industry representatives and business/industry is waiting to see results from these meetings. She said it is time for workforce development leaders in the state to demonstrate to business and industry that their concerns have been heard and something is being done. Business/industry wants things to begin happening now, she added, and until it does many of them will not come to the table.

Melody Whitten of Snead State Community College said the issues identified are the same as those that were effectively being addressed by School-To-Career, a federally funded program that ended in 2003.

Group members agreed that duplication of workforce development efforts exists and that educating parents and students regarding careers and the need for skill training is critical. There is also a need to think globally and develop a strategic plan that bypasses political issues.

At the conclusion of the meeting Dr. Robinson thanked all for attending and said a task force will be formed to tackle the identified issues. Those present were asked to volunteer for the task force if interested. The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

**North Alabama International Trade Association
Globally Competitive Community
Education/Workforce Development Focus Group
May 23, 2005 - 10:30 a.m.
Sheraton Conference Room – Huntsville, Alabama**

Attendees

1. Gwen Baker, Calhoun Community College
2. Jim Swindell, Calhoun Community College
3. Ronnie Smith, AIDT
4. Daryl Gurley, Alabama A&M University
5. Karen Morgan, Marshall County EDC
6. Teresa Walker, Kappler, Inc.
7. Melody Whitten, Snead State Community College
8. Fred Burg, State of Alabama
9. Neal Morrison, Wallace State
10. Paul Kelly, Port of Huntsville
11. Blake Robbins, Decatur Chamber of Commerce
12. Ernie Glenn, Manufacture Alabama
13. Ann Kennamer, IMPACT Learning Center
14. Alice Schaum, Alabama Office of Workforce Development
15. Mike Kennamer, Northeast Alabama Community College
16. Eddie Littrell, Analytical Services, Inc.
17. Cheryl Schultz, Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County
18. Loren Traylor, Chamber of Commerce of Huntsville/Madison County
19. Franklin Evans, Drake State Technical College
20. Jim Ellis, Alabama Council for International Programs & Auburn University
21. Mark Anderson, Athens State University
22. Lisa Ballard, Port of Huntsville