



Governor's College and Career Ready Task Force

Report on Recommendations to Governor Robert Bentley

January 3, 2014

Governor's College and Career Readiness Task Force

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Governor Bentley's Call to Action

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.

Drawing leaders from these areas recognizes the integral role that they all play in the overall development of an educated and highly skilled workforce. Educators around the state and at all levels possess unique expertise in the education, preparation, and training of students for success in career endeavors. Similarly, leaders in business and industry have unique insight in regard to the appropriate development of skills and preparation necessary for success in their respective fields. It is only through frequent, meaningful communication around education and workforce issues that these leaders can realize the mutually reinforcing benefits that these entities can have upon each other.

Alabama devotes significant resources to education and workforce development programs at the local, regional and state levels. Governor Bentley has expressed his clear desire for these entities to work together to ensure that all Alabama citizens have the opportunity to pursue their educational goals and realize attractive, long term career opportunities. By harnessing the focus, strategic direction, combined efforts and expertise of these educational and workforce partners, Alabama can continue to make great strides in delivering the workforce that will power Alabama's economic future.

Education, Industry, and Workforce Trends

College and career readiness is particularly important to Alabama now, as the economy continues to grow and add jobs. Prior to the recession beginning in 2007, Alabama experienced extremely low unemployment rates and a healthy state GDP. In a sense, Alabama was utilizing nearly the entire available workforce to meet the needs of its growing economy. At the same time, the nature of many jobs was shifting to reflect industry demand for higher levels of skill and educational attainment. Ten year industry forecasts show a significant rise in demand for skilled workers, particularly those with a high school degree and some industry credential or certificate, and also for those with bachelor's degree and above.

On average, education level strongly correlates with annual earnings, and more educated people are more likely to participate in the workforce and remain employed during

periods of increasing unemployment. State and national analyses clearly demonstrate the importance of education in building and employing a skilled workforce over time.

Alabama faces numerous challenges as it attempts to dramatically improve the college and career readiness of its students and adults to meet the needs of a growing economy. Due to various factors, the state has experienced a lower labor force participation rate than the national average, and high school graduation rates, while climbing, remain below the national average. The high school graduation rate remains a key metric for evaluating college and career readiness.

Many structural and demographic challenges face the country at large, such as the aging and retirement of the baby boomer population. In the coming years, without significant population growth or improvements to career readiness, the state could witness more citizens exiting the workforce due to retirement than we have younger citizens entering the workforce from educational institutions. Large waves of retirements create a loss of valuable institutional knowledge for employers, and can create a strain on hiring and operations when adequately skilled employees are difficult to find.

Furthermore, technology is accelerating the pace of change in nearly all industries, which can effectively reduce the “shelf life” for hard skills. In turn, this increases the need for lifetime learning opportunities and additional job training for adults. These trends have clear implications for Alabama’s educational and workforce development systems, and leaders must respond to the increasing importance of highly skilled workers to meet the demands of an increasingly high tech economy.

It is within this context that the Governor’s Task Force sought to identify and analyze those areas deemed most critical for today’s leaders, as they seek to improve college and career readiness, and for students, as they become more aware of and pursue college and career opportunities. The Task Force therefore concentrated its efforts on issues such as how to:

- enhance education and industry collaboration on an ongoing basis,
- promote educational access, articulation, and communication along the educational pipeline,
- ensure appropriate development of essential professional skills (also known as “soft skills”)
- raise awareness of and promote access to high potential career pathways
- in general, encourage more participation in projected high demand, high wage, career opportunities within the State of Alabama

The Task Force has developed a series of recommendations addressing the critical areas of industry participation and advisory, management decision-making tools for education and workforce development, direct student and adult learner initiatives, and marketing and communications for career opportunities. The recommendations put forth by the Task Force are discussed in detail below.

A. Recommendation: Statewide Workforce Council

The Task Force recommends the establishment of a statewide workforce council that shall 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 and the Superintendent of the Alabama Department of Education in formulating policies, developing innovative educational workforce programming, and discussing issues related to the workforce development needs of the State of Alabama. 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 Council of College and University Presidents, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, and the Alabama Office of School Readiness (pre-kindergarten programs) to ensure continuous emphasis on pre-kindergarten through-graduate education.

The statewide workforce council should be codified into state law. Therefore, legislation must be enacted in order to codify the council, and executive action will be required to establish and implement the council immediately upon passage.

Once the council is empanelled, the actions of the statewide council may affect the regional councils. Therefore, the Governor may need to amend an existing Executive Order, create a new Executive Order, or pass additional legislation in order to ensure that the membership of the ten Regional Workforce Development Councils reflect the local and regional industry sectors for the purposes of informing workforce development decisions made locally by the statewide council.

The statewide workforce council will be tasked with reviewing the following initiatives and developing recommendations, if necessary, associated with these ideas:

- A. Steps must be taken to streamline and align the current existing workforce development functions of the state, as many of these functions seem to operate independently, rather than in a collaborative manner. This can be done by establishing the statewide workforce council and using the regional workforce development councils more efficiently to help implement recommendations from the statewide council.

- B. Action is needed to increase awareness and to educate students at all levels about the opportunities available in various industry sectors. This can be done by establishing a “Train-the-Trainers” program that would train school counselors and other school representatives about various employment opportunities. This can also be done by hiring enough Career Coaches to serve all high schools (and possibly middle schools) in the state. Career Coaches serve as a liaison to assist students in selecting and pursuing a career path that best suits their skill set.
- C. A feedback loop should be established to create dialogue between the education community and interested businesses and industries. This can be done by working with and through various education and industry groups, organizations, and trade associations. Dialogue can also be created by scheduling meetings between these groups and by having industry representatives complete surveys about their current and future hiring needs as well as the ways in which the education community could assist industry in preparing students for future employment.
- D. Workforce development initiatives could be aided by the establishment of industry-funded scholarship programs and tax incentives that would assist students seeking to attend community colleges, pursue vocational programs, and participate in dual enrollment programs.
- E. There is a need for an increased public relations and marketing campaign for career readiness programs and skilled craft trades (see also related Recommendation). This can be done by establishing an online portal that will serve as a “one stop shop” where students can go online and review detailed information about career and education opportunities available to him or her. In addition, both industry and education leaders could have access to this portal, which would increase the amount of shared information available to these parties and potentially increase collaboration between them. This could also be accomplished by creating a broad social media campaign targeted at the relevant students and by increasing the number of career and job fairs that focus on opportunities in a broad range of industry sectors.
- F. The statewide workforce council should recommend a mechanism that will ensure continuous focus and emphasis on pre-kindergarten through graduate level education.
- G. The statewide workforce council should recommend standards for membership on the ten currently existing regional workforce development councils.

The time frame for implementing many of these items will be dependent upon the passage of legislation to codify the council. Therefore, the goal in the first year of this process is to draft, introduce, and work towards passage of legislation during the 2014 Regular Session that will establish the statewide workforce council. Once the legislation is passed, focus should shift to appointing members to the statewide workforce council, beginning to create the goals for the council, and establishing a budget and funding source. If the passage of legislation is achieved and the statewide workforce council begins operating as planned, the council may begin making recommendations to the Governor, the Legislature, the State Board of Education,

and the Alabama Council of College and University Presidents on ways to improve workforce development activities in the state.

The Secretary of Commerce should have responsibility for the administration functions of the Council, including but not limited to the organization of meetings, preparing the annual report, and other items as needed by the Council.

Due to the numerous state and local departments and agencies that are in some way involved in the workforce development activities of the state, the following departments and organizations should be involved, consulted, and/or kept abreast of the activities of the statewide workforce council:

- Office of the Governor
- Legislative leaders
- Regional Workforce Development Councils
- Alabama State Board of Education
- PK-12
- Two-year colleges
- Four-year universities
- Department of Commerce
- Business and industry
- Trade associations
- Chambers of Commerce

The Task Force believes that establishing a statewide workforce council will increase coordination and collaboration between all stakeholders involved in workforce development across the state. Based upon our review and discussion of these issues, it appears that one of the major issues holding these efforts back is the fragmentation that exists among various departments and agencies, so the council should review ways to streamline and align the existing workforce development functions of the state. Therefore, the proposed legislation requires coordination and collaboration across the PK-12, two-year and four-year college systems, and business and industry. By implementing many of the proposals suggested herein, business and industry will receive and have access to a better, more qualified, and more skilled workforce. In addition, students at all levels of education in the state will select a defined career path and receive coaching that will assist with progress towards graduation and a focus on his or her career path. Ultimately, improvement in each of these areas will lead to a more prosperous Alabama.

The most important aspect of this process is to pass legislation in 2014 that establishes and codifies the statewide workforce council. Next, the council can begin to review the specific duties as outlined in the legislation and develop recommendations accordingly. Ultimately, the success of this proposal over the long-term will be judged by whether there is an increased availability of a qualified and skilled workforce in the State of Alabama.

B. Recommendation: Business Sector and Career Pathways Approach

In order to provide a conceptual framework for better aligning education and training programs (workforce development) with business needs and related career opportunities (economic development), it is recommended that Alabama adopt a Business Sector and Career Pathways approach to assisting citizens to become college and career ready. 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.

Career pathways offer a number of benefits to educators, students, employers, and society in general including:

- Context—Career pathways show students how academic concepts are used outside the classroom.
- Purpose—Career pathways motivate students and give them a desire to stay in school.
- Focus (with flexibility)—Every career pathway leads the student toward personal and professional goals—while providing the flexibility to change at any time.
- Rigor and relevance—Career pathways are academically rigorous. They integrate STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) with language arts, social studies, history and other academic subjects in the context of the world of work.
- A level playing field—Career pathways take into consideration the variety of student learning styles.
- Guidance for career selection and a foundation for career pursuit—With

career pathways, students begin their long-term planning early. As a result, every student has a sense of possible career directions. Every course, every concept leads toward an identified goal.

- Opportunities for interdisciplinary problem-solving and critical thinking—Career pathways produce “knowledge workers” who understand systems and can solve problems in teams.
- A foundation for lifelong learning, and lifelong earning—Career pathways are all about building toward the future, a future in which students can fulfill their potential on the job and in their homes and communities.

More specifically, using this recommended approach, education, workforce development and industry leaders can remain engaged in a collaborative fashion. Specifically, industry leaders will:

- (a) Review the elements of sector and career pathways approaches and evaluate their programs and practices based on best practices identified in these approaches.
- (b) Identify major sectors in Alabama and its regional economies and ensure that active sector industry groups are identifying current and projected workforce needs.
- (c) Determine each sector’s current and projected high-growth, high-demand, high-pay occupations.
- (d) Analyze current and projected supply-demand equilibrium in those critical occupations identified in (c) above.
- (e) Implement new or exciting career pathways approaches across all education and training activities (e.g. P-12, community colleges, registered apprenticeships, in-house business training programs, colleges, universities, etc.) that lead to business and industry-recognized credentials that are stackable and portable.

Implementation of the Business Sector and Career Pathways 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 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.

C. Recommendation: Career Coaches Program

It is recommended that a cadre of Career Coaches be employed, trained and deployed to work with all K-12 schools in order to develop and implement 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 Governor expand this concept to ensure adequate coverage to serve students in all public high schools in Alabama.

These individuals will act as career coaches, recruiters, and case managers with traditional and non-traditional students and their influencers at home, school, and across workforce development organizations. These 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.

More specifically, these individuals will ensure that a Career Pathway Plan 4+2+2 is complete, that students are given career opportunities in all career clusters/industry sectors; ensure attention to essential/soft skills training; coordinate with industry to provide work-based learning opportunities for students; and provide direct access to local/regional workforce information provided by industry partners.

D. Recommendation: Critical Unmet Needs (Strategic Initiatives)

Alabama's global economy places a high premium on innovation, adaptability, and customization. As Alabama industries compete within the global economy, workforce development needs arise from time to time which cannot be immediately met within existing resources and organizational constraints. AIDT is tasked and funded to meet such unique demands for new and expanding industries of certain types, but resources are scarce to meet such unique needs for existing businesses and industries. Such needs often require equipment, facilities, instructors and even unique partnerships and delivery systems outside normal operations to meet a new or expanded demand in a given region.

For instance, a unique partnership among workforce partners was established to meet the tremendous demand for specialized welders in Mobile. A similar unique partnership with customized curricula was developed in Tuscaloosa to assist Mercedes Benz. As an example, one such current need is to establish a cadre of skilled tool and die professionals and related businesses in the state to meet the documented needs of advanced manufacturing.

This recommendation involves establishing a process for identifying, conceptualizing, funding, prioritizing, and delivering programs and activities to meet such unique needs.

More specifically,

- (a) Utilize sector-driven needs analysis provided by the website described above to determine the most critical needs that cannot be met by existing programs and activities.
- (b) Prioritize needs outlined in (a) above.
- (c) Award funds to develop appropriate response to existing workforce entities or establish new partnerships, programs and activities as required.
- (d) Develop unique education and training programs and activities to meet need.
- (e) Recruit participants and implement program.
- (f) Evaluate results.
- (g) Fold program into existing organization if long-term need; cease if need is met.

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

Research indicates that young people and their influencers often lack accurate, complete and current information related to career options, related courses of study and the available avenues for obtaining appropriate education and training. In order to correct the misinformation and misperceptions, research has also indicated that effective messaging delivered to target audiences via effective media is necessary. Modern career messaging and recruitment must employ accurate, current information utilizing electronic information bases, mass media, social media, and must be constantly updated. This recommended initiative seeks to develop and make available such a marketing, recruitment, and communications campaign in order to give career counselors, students, parents and other influencers accurate and current information concerning career options, career pathways, and the essential skills necessary in the workplace for success.

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.

The website will provide for user registration to build an ongoing relationship to provide two-way communication as career exploration matures into career selection and preparation.

The initiative would teach career coaches, workforce development, HR business personnel and workforce/economic development leaders to utilize the information in allotting resources to provide those career preparation programs which promise good careers for citizens and good workers for business.

In addition to focusing on high value occupations and career pathways, the marketing and communications plan should highlight the vital importance of essential “soft” skills and opportunities for soft skills education, as detailed in the Soft Skills training recommendation. From studies and anecdotal evidence, it is clear that Alabama citizens are mostly unaware of the critical nature of these basic and essential professional skills in the workplace. For this reason, an essential soft skills component should be incorporated into the overall marketing and communications strategy.

F. Recommendation: Student Credentialing and/or Earning Dual Enrollment Credit

In keeping with Alabama’s strategic plan for education, known as PLAN 2020, we recommend that K12 schools statewide implement and/or expand industry credentialing programs. K12 Students will have the opportunity to earn specific industry credentials and/or transcribed college credit through 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 dual enrollment opportunities based on industry input informed by high-wage, high-demand careers 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.

Students who participate and earn these industry-specific credentials will exit high school with appropriate entry level skills recognized and defined by business and industry. These credentials would even be printed on students’ high school permanent records, and could be presented to prospective employers. Students will take a pre-assessment to determine eligibility for state-funded industry credentials; this approach will ensure greater return on investment (ROI) for the credentialing program. Providing additional opportunity for ACCESS classes will help to alleviate barriers for students in rural locations. This delivery

method would allow students to pursue career pathways that might not otherwise be available. As a result of this recommendation, industry will see more credentialed students available for entry-level employment, which would decrease initial training costs for industry and ultimately increase employee retention.

Dual enrollment provides an opportunity for students to earn college credit toward a certificate or degree and transition to industry with a higher level of training at an accelerated rate. It is further recommended that the State of Alabama provide technical dual enrollment scholarships for all interested and qualified Alabama high school students. Reviewing students' success rate on credentialing assessments will provide insight for additional industry involvement in traditional classroom instruction. Similarly, dual enrollment success should be measured based on the percent of students utilizing and completing a related college program in same area of study in which the dual enrollment credit was earned.

G. Recommendation: Career Pathways Plan

Every high school student is required to complete a career plan in the ninth grade as part of a new career preparedness course and revisit it every year with the aid of career coaches and other school personnel providing updates or changes as necessary. It is essential to provide academic and career direction along with tangible skills for their future. This plan will put students on a defined career path at the K12 level using indicators such as interest, aptitude, and work values assessments. This will also provide a clear path for continuing their education in the student's chosen field beyond high school or successful entry into employment. A plan for every student will lead to more participants in the workforce, less college debt associated with students, and a higher graduation rate both at the K12 and post-secondary levels.

An executive order mandating a career pathways plan for every ninth grade student recognizes the importance of this essential component to student success. To accomplish this, a career coach in every school would ensure the implementation and provide accountability by working in tandem with middle and high school counselors. The net results of the career assessments and plan developed is a comprehensive 4 + 2 + 2 year plan (four years of high school with direct entry into the workforce, or two years community college, or entry into a university). This plan serves as a blueprint for courses, industry recognized credentials, post high school education, development of the essential skills needed for college/career, student organizations and activities to provide experiences that strengthen student entry into the workforce.

Input from statewide regional workforce councils, industry associations, and individual companies will guide curriculum and shape the individual student's career pathways plan. A comprehensive marketing campaign addressing educators, students, and particularly parents around the value of a 4 + 2 + 2 year plan will be essential to the successful implementation of

career pathways. The plan should identify educational requirements or credentials required for different career paths, and examples of institutions or resources that could help the student achieve his/her career goals.

H. Recommendation: Statewide Soft Skills Training

In recent years, the term “soft skills” has been used to describe an increasingly more important aspect or dimension of workplace culture in the United States. Most business and industry leaders refer to soft skills as “essential skills” in an effort to emphasize the significant and vital nature of this workforce characteristic. In a quick review of the literature on soft or essential skills, one will quickly find repeated references to the crucial nature of this worker trait or quality.

Although there are many definitions for soft or essential skills, most suggest that they are personal attributes or characteristics that enable an individual to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. More specifically and within the workplace, soft or essential skills are considered a vital or crucial complement to hard skills, which refer to a person's knowledge and occupational skill set. Psychologists and sociologists often use the term soft skills to describe a person's "EQ" or emotional intelligence quotient. Soft or essential skills typically have more to do with who we are than what we know. Soft or essential skills typically encompass the character traits that decide how well one interacts with others, and are usually a definite part of one's personality. Many would suggest that hard skills can be learned and perfected over time, while soft or essential skills are more difficult to acquire and change.

Although not a comprehensive list, examples of soft or essential skills would include strong work ethic, positive attitude, good communication skills, time management abilities, problem-solving skills, acting as an effective team player, appropriate self-confidence, ability to accept and learning from criticism, flexibility and adaptability, and working well under pressure. On a final note, the literature is clear about the fact that up to 85 percent of all individuals who are terminated from their jobs, lose those jobs because of serious personal limitations in soft or essential skills rather than weaknesses in hard skills.

Recognizing the critical nature of soft or essential skills and the development of those soft or essential skills, the Task Force makes the following related recommendations:

Statewide Soft Skills Training

The Task Force recommends that every Alabama public high school student and Alabama community college student **must** 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.

On Demand Soft Skills Education

The Task Force recommends that soft or essential skills education be made available through every Alabama community college on demand. The committee strongly urged that every community college offer soft skills education on an ongoing or continual basis, thereby making such education readily available to all Alabamians at any time. 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.

On Site Soft Skills Education

Local Community Colleges should make soft or essential skills education available on site to all business and industry within the state of Alabama. Business and industry value soft or essential skills but believe that soft or essential skills development is education's responsibility. Once implemented, this recommendation would allow local business and industry to contact their local community college and in turn that college would provide an instructor and necessary materials to deliver essential soft skills education at the work site for employees.

I. Recommendation: Shared Definition of Remediation

Remediation of high school graduates entering community colleges and institutions of higher education is an indication that there is a lack of alignment of the academic expectations between these three entities and the K-12 public school system. To alleviate that misalignment Alabama has set forth a broad goal within its PLAN 2020 to reduce the number of students requiring remedial education through the development of a shared definition of remediation that will be consistent among K-12, Post-Secondary and Higher Education.

Individuals representing all of the entities referenced above have begun the process of development of this shared definition and will be working through the Alabama Articulation and General Studies Committee who serves as a coordinating body for these types of shared and articulated agreements.

Upon adoption of this shared definition K-12 schools across our state will have clear articulated targets upon which to determine the college and career readiness of our students. To support this endeavor the Alabama State Board of Education has adopted college and career

ready standards and assessments that are now aligned to the expectations for post-secondary, higher education and business and industry that will accelerate the reduction of students enrolled in remedial classes and the tuition costs associated with what are often non-credit for graduation course.

It is the desire of the Task Force that this shared definition be developed and approved through a memorandum of agreements among all parties. Upon adoption, a truly seamless K-20 alignment through which students and the institutions they represent can work collaboratively to ensure student success, an educated and skilled workforce and a citizenry prepared for the 21st century will be created.

J. Recommendation: Linked Statewide Data System

The Task Force recommends that the Governor charge the related institutions with building the capability to utilize existing student and workforce data to better inform program decisions and monitor overall progress of education and workforce development initiatives. A state-wide longitudinal data system with real time information can assist students and their families, education, and industry in projecting and meeting requirements for a prepared workforce to meet the competitive economic needs of the state.

By pursuing this recommendation, the state will dramatically improve its ability to use data across workforce and educational systems to improve management planning, analysis, and future program design, and even career choices for students. Currently, the State's career centers, Department of Labor, postsecondary education, and K12 systems all maintain comprehensive IT systems; however, the ability to conduct longitudinal data analysis and monitor program success over time, as adults and students progress from education to the workforce is significantly limited. Many other states have made admirable strides in using this type of existing data competitively for economic development and recruitment of industry, for example.

The ability to demonstrate and understand what types of skills are produced and resident within given areas is incredibly valuable to educators, industry, and students alike, and can inform future program investments and identify shortages and skills needs. Taken with current and projected job growth data, a more robust system can identify opportunities in the job market with potential supply and demand analyses. This type of information can be immensely valuable for students and adults making career pathway decisions in school and in the workforce. As a result, citizens can make "smarter" decisions with their education investments of time and money.

Numerous state organizations currently maintain systems relevant to this recommendation and should be directly involved in the planning and execution. These include: Alabama Commission on Higher Education, Department of Postsecondary Education, Department of Education (K-12), Department of Labor, and the Department of Commerce.

Executive action will be needed to direct agency heads to coordinate the effort in establishing links between agencies in support of education/training and improved labor opportunities. The leaders of the participating agencies should direct the effort and issue a charge for its completion. These leaders should identify key IT and research specialists to identify appropriate links (and available resources), based upon an inventory of programs, hardware, functions, and staff. With a completed plan, the State will be able to define actual IT software, infrastructure, and implementation needs. The legislature may wish to provide a Joint Resolution in support of the coordinated effort.

Developing these longitudinal data links with IT systems will present a complex implementation process, but the enhanced capability will generate significant benefits to the State of Alabama over time:

- (a) Improves the data support system for decision making at all levels, which will in turn improve the allocation of financial resources particularly for education and workforce development programs.
- (b) Identifies issues and concerns in attaining educational success, e.g. remedial education issues, dual enrollment opportunities, successful programming, and shortfalls/needs within the system.
- (c) Supports a reduction in cost by noting working programs and evaluating (successful—failed) efforts at all levels.
- (d) Supports placement, retention, and completion efforts.
- (e) Highlights workforce dynamics for potential career opportunities for students, families, and educational institutions
- (f) Provide historical and longitudinal data to identify trends, needs, potential problems, etc. to make appropriate state-wide decisions.
- (g) Provide the ability to identify education and training needs to meet business and industry demands in the short term and for business /industry recruiting in the future.

While IT system enhancements may not appear to be the most attractive strategic investments, leaders from industry and education have consistently emphasized the need for good data to make better decisions, especially in an environment of scarce education and

workforce resources. The Task Force recommends that the Governor engage the leaders of the relevant organizations to pursue the initial planning and analysis steps required to implement this recommendation.

IV. Next Steps and Conclusion

With the presentation of this report, the Task Force strongly encourages the Governor to adopt, with organizational zeal and due haste, these recommendations, and deliver the results needed for a healthy, growing and prosperous citizenry and state economy.

Based on the experiences and suggestions of many of the Task Force's executives, the Governor might further consider designating individuals to a program management office that will work in coordination with the Governor's office, relevant organizations, and the workforce advisory council when operational, to develop work plans, implementation schedules, detailed execution plans, leadership assignments, and measurement systems, as appropriate to ensure effective management of the recommendations going forward.

Some of the recommendations as noted can be pursued with focused executive leadership and collaboration and without special appropriations; in these cases we encourage the Governor to work with leadership of the respective organizations to implement these changes directly. Other key elements of the plan should be incorporated into the Governor's legislative agenda, so that he can begin to work with key legislators to enact the recommended changes and initiatives requiring legislative action or specific appropriations.

The members of the Task Force are confident that upon adoption of these recommendations, more students will graduate with a better idea of where they want to go in terms of higher education or careers, what they want to do, and what steps will be required to pursue those career paths. These students will be more prepared for successful college careers, with fewer needing to devote time and resources to remediation. Additionally, more adults will have information on career opportunities, where to go for job retraining, and what resources and funding might be available for education and skill programs.

Ultimately, by adopting these recommendations, and by continuing with the many, successful education and workforce development programs already in place, Alabama should see improvement across several key metrics, including:

- improved high school graduation rates
- higher levels of skill attainment and educational achievement overall
- higher workforce participation rates

- increases in average per capita income
- greater economic growth (state GDP)

Finally, it is our recommendation that the Governor continue to engage education and industry, and promote an environment of collaboration, communication and shared responsibility for achieving success, as exemplified by the work of this Task Force. It has been a pleasure for the members to serve the Governor and the State of Alabama in this most worthwhile endeavor.