

About Southern Growth Policies Board:

Southern Growth Policies Board is a non-partisan public policy think tank based in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Formed by the region's governors in 1971, Southern Growth Policies Board develops and advances visionary economic development policies by providing a forum for collaboration among a diverse cross-section of the region's governors, legislators, business and academic leaders and the economic- and community-development sectors. Supported by the governments of 13 Southern states—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico—Southern Growth provides a gathering place for regional collaboration.

Southern Growth's research focus encompasses the major drivers for economic development in the South—innovation and technology, globalization, the changing nature of the workforce and the vital role of the community. Southern Growth provides its members, and the region, with authoritative research, discussion forums and pilot projects that define the critical issues shaping the South. Southern Growth develops new regional strategies for economic development and identifies best practices to facilitate action. To learn more about Southern Growth Policies Board, visit www.southern.org.

For Further Reading:

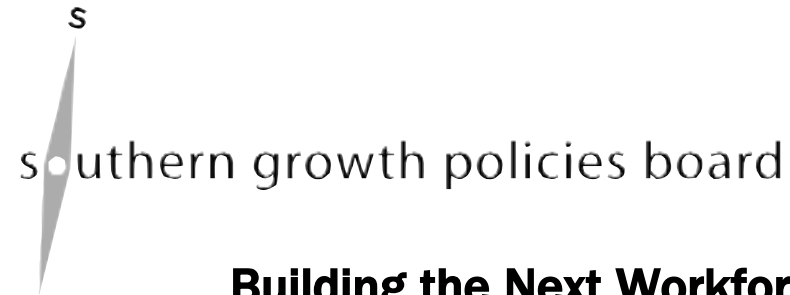
A Southern Growth Policies Board report, *The Southern Workforce Index*, identifies 15 indicators for measuring the region's progress and contains state-by-state data and summaries of workforce initiatives in the region. See www.southern.org/pubs/workforceindex2005/index.shtml.

The 2006 report *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* talks about the global economy and the critical need to improve U.S. science and math education in order to remain competitive in the future. It is available at www.nap.edu/catalog/11463.html.

The website of the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov) has a wealth of information on employment trends and statistics. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm) may be of particular interest. Educational statistics are available from the National Center for Education Statistics, at <http://nces.ed.gov>.

The Southern Regional Education Board (www.sreb.org), the Education Commission of the States (www.ecs.org), Jobs for the Future (www.jff.org) and the Gates Foundation (www.gatesfoundation.org) are good sources of information on educational reform.

The websites of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce (www.uschamber.com) and the National Association of Manufacturers' Center for Workforce Success (www.nam.org) provide information on businesses' workforce needs.



Building the Next Workforce: Making Choices for Your Community

Help Wanted: Creative individuals with strong problem-solving skills, excellent computer skills, the flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing markets, the ability to work in a multi-disciplinary environment, and the skills needed to effectively collaborate across cultures in a global marketplace.

Want ads for tomorrow's workforce will look decidedly different from those of the past. Just as the economy is changing, so are the skills needed for a competitive workforce.

A high school education is no longer enough. Eighty percent of the nation's 30 fastest growing jobs—including computer software engineers, forensic science technicians, and dental hygienists—require at least some postsecondary education. Over the next ten years, some 36 percent of new jobs are expected to be filled by those with at least a bachelor's degree.

Important trends to consider include:

- Our population, and workforce, is aging. The South's population of senior citizens is projected to grow by 28 percent over the next ten years, compared with a growth rate of only four percent for 18 to 24 year olds and a small decline in the 25 to 44 age group.
- Immigrants and minorities are expected to make up an increasing share of the future workforce. Yet, 44 percent of Hispanics and 24 percent of African Americans in the South have less than a high school degree.
- Many say that our education system is not doing its job. The South is losing an estimated \$256 million a year to provide remedial education to students who recently completed high school but are not ready for college level work.
- High school graduates lack soft skills such as professionalism and work ethic, said nearly three-quarters of human resource managers who responded to a recent national survey.

What can your community do to build a competitive workforce for the future? Southern Growth Policies Board has designed this discussion booklet to stimulate conversation about the best way to approach this issue in your community.

Approach 1

Focus on Educational Achievement

Skill requirements for jobs are rising across the board. A high school degree is no longer a ticket to success. We need to focus on raising educational achievement and promoting postsecondary education for everyone.

What Can Be Done?

- Reduce high school dropouts and get those who have dropped out back on track.
- Ensure that everyone has the basic skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education.
- Redefine high schools and promote more seamless transitions to postsecondary education, such as through dual enrollment programs with community colleges.
- Develop outreach and support programs to increase minority and disadvantaged enrollment and retention in postsecondary education.

In Support

- More than three-quarters of the nation's fastest growing jobs require at least some postsecondary education.
- The weekly earnings for workers with bachelor's degrees were 60 percent higher than those with high school degrees in 2005.
- The U.S. ranks fifth among developed countries in terms of college participation rates, but drops to 16th in terms of college completion.

In Opposition

- There are plenty of good jobs that require less than a college degree. Parents and counselors need to know about and promote these opportunities.
- It's too expensive to expect everyone to get a postsecondary degree. How will we pay for this?
- It's unrealistic to expect everyone to go on to postsecondary education. Some are just not cut out for it.

Approach 2

Focus on Serving Industry

Businesses create most of the jobs in the region, so we should focus on serving their needs. Workforce skills need to match workplace needs. What good does it do to get a degree if you don't have the right skills to get a job?

What Can Be Done?

- Work with businesses to identify skill sets needed for workers in various industries and develop certification programs around them.
- Boost investments in community colleges.
- Promote high school career academies and other school-to-career programs.
- Connect workforce development programs on a regional basis.

In Support

- More than 80 percent of manufacturers say they are having trouble finding qualified employees.
- The current role of businesses in workforce development is often superficial and/or sporadic.
- A recent survey by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce showed that well over half of businesses weren't aware of workforce development centers in their area.

In Opposition

- This approach ties us to industries that may not be around in the future.
- It's hard to change the curriculum rapidly enough to meet changing employer needs.
- We need to teach the ability to learn, not work-specific training. This approach doesn't promote creativity or holistic thinking.

Approach 3

Focus on Workforce Traits

Technological advances and global competition have increased the pace of change for today's businesses. As a result, workers can expect to change jobs—and even careers—many times throughout their work life. The best preparation is the development of a good work ethic, a value for lifelong learning, and transferable skills such as flexibility, teamwork and self-initiative.

What Can Be Done?

- Include ethics education and soft skills, such as communication and team building, in the school curriculum at all levels.
- Expand opportunities for lifelong learning through flexible and affordable strategies.
- Teach entrepreneurial skills and encourage entrepreneurial attitudes.
- Get parents more involved.

In Support

- Workers need to be prepared for job changes. Recent data shows that Baby Boomers held an average of 10.5 jobs and had 4.9 spells of unemployment between the ages of 18 and 40.
- Flexibility and the ability to learn are critical components of innovation.
- In a 2005 survey, manufacturers rated "basic employability skills," such as timeliness and communication, just as important as technical skills.

In Opposition

- Character is difficult to teach and impossible to measure.
- Parents, not schools, should be responsible for character development.
- A nice smile and good listening skills aren't enough in today's technological world.