Workforce Development in SREB States: The Role of Two-Year Colleges in Preparing Students for Middle-Skill Jobs

America and the South seem to have turned a corner on the deep and prolonged recession that started in 2008. It caught many by surprise for the stranglehold it has had on jobs and job prospects, and it has caused education leaders to refocus state policy on the relationship between career preparation and education.

This report provides updates on the ongoing conversation among leaders in SREB states about workforce education and job preparation for the future. It looks at the area of greatest job need — the lack of workers in the middle who can perform “middle-skill” jobs. It explores the role of the region’s community and technical colleges — the institutions that grant the certificates and associate degrees needed for many of these jobs. It also addresses K-12 education, which plays a vital role in keeping the pathways strong for students to earn the credentials necessary for these jobs.

SREB’s priority on middle-skill jobs heightened with the launch of the Challenge 2020 Goals for Education. SREB has gathered information about workforce development related to these jobs, especially the kinds of K-12 and postsecondary education needed. This status report provides background information on workforce development and middle-skill jobs in SREB states and describes practices that states are using to identify workforce and education challenges they face and solutions they are implementing.

It is no surprise that some SREB states appear ahead of others in planning, organizing and implementing effective workforce development and education strategies to meet emerging needs. To provide context, this report gives you an overview of the latest policy research on workforce development in Section I — definitions and demographics. It then summarizes interviews between SREB policy analysts and key state leaders about middle-skill jobs and workforce development in the region. Seven themes that emerged from SREB’s analyses of the interviews are laid out in Section II. Then, the responses to the interview questions are summarized in Section III. The report provides these leaders’ perspectives on the status of SREB states in meeting workforce needs, raises the

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This report was prepared by Jeff Gagne, Joan Lord and Michaela Corrente based on interviews with SREB state leaders (from workforce development, community and technical colleges, and K-12 career and technical education) and reviews of state documents. Contact joan.lord@sreb.org for further information.
challenges the region faces and holds up the prospects for the future. Policy analysts who followed SREB states even before the recession saw three states out front on addressing workforce needs as early as 2006. At that time, SREB’s report *Holding Colleges and Universities Accountable for Meeting State Needs* focused on the importance of public agendas to states. Public agendas are, at their core, statements of workforce needs and of general expectations that higher education institutions will work to meet those needs.

Three SREB states had adopted such agendas at the time: Kentucky, Oklahoma and Tennessee. They were showcased in the 2006 report. Education agencies in these states had based academic and student support planning on the needs identified in their states’ public agendas. The foresight of these three states set them ahead. You’ll see in this report that Kentucky and Oklahoma are today engaged in new sector strategy planning that involves community and technical colleges. Tennessee has tied state funding for colleges and universities not only to the growth in the number of degrees and certificates they award, but also to the employment of their graduates — giving these institutions incentives to work toward effective degree productivity.

These three states, however, are not the only leaders in workforce development in the region. Arkansas, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina and Texas are engaged in sector strategy planning involving key industries and community colleges. Alabama and Georgia are strong in aligning program curricula across their respective state institutions so students are assured of high-quality program content regardless of where they attend. When workforce needs change, academic programs in these states can change quickly, and these states can ensure that the program changes are distributed immediately everywhere in the states they are offered.

**Section I: Situating Middle-Skill Jobs in Today’s Economy**

For sure, too many young adults complete their schooling at all levels only to find they aren’t qualified for the jobs they’d counted on — or they find that those jobs no longer exist. Or, perhaps they find they are one of hundreds applying for a handful of jobs in their preferred fields. As signs of an improving economy have crept into the press, the employment and unemployment statistics have been among the slowest to improve. When these numbers finally moved, they showed that the labor market had shifted. The once stalwart blue-collar, service and office jobs of the American middle class had stalled or worse. Outsourcing of skilled manufacturing to offshore locations in recent years and advances in technologies like robotics have decimated the job picture in some industrial sectors.

The Georgetown Public Policy Institute reported, not surprisingly, that the recession hit those with less education harder than those with more education. In a 2012 report, the institute showed that those with a high school education or less “bore the brunt” of the tightened economy, losing 5.6 million jobs. Moreover, they continued to lose jobs in the recovery that began in January 2010. To the surprise of many, people with bachelor’s degrees gained nearly
200,000 jobs in the recession, and they gained two million more in the recovery from January 2010 through February 2012.

Significantly, the report also revealed the fate of those in the middle. People with some college credits — even if they had not completed an associate degree — lost 1.75 million jobs, on average, in the recession. But in the first 14 months of recovery, they gained back an almost equivalent number of jobs — 1.6 million.

Analyses such as these paint a positive picture for the middle-skill worker on the far side of the recession. They show there will be jobs for these workers. In fact, they show these workers as essential to the economic engine of the future. While most studies show growth in the demand for low- and high-skill workers, they also indicate a very substantial need for well-trained middle-skill workers in a wide range of industry sectors. Some predict that as growth in high-skill workers occurs, a corollary growth in middle-skill workers to support them also will occur. For every doctor, lawyer, engineer or scientist, the workforce needs a team of support workers as well.

The conclusion of most who have studied future workforce development is that these middle-skill workers will need education beyond high school — at least one year — to be ready for these jobs. They assert that the high school course work these students need must include solid preparation for postsecondary study.

**Defining Middle-Skill Jobs**

Most researchers have relied on straightforward approaches to defining middle-skill jobs, although more recently the definition has become more refined. All of the definitions focus only on the education required by the jobs. They do not describe what individuals need to know and be able to do to hold these jobs. The jobs themselves can be vastly different — from firefighter to manufacturing technician, from legal assistant to dental hygenist, and from plumber to sales associate. And, according to the Georgetown Public Policy Institute, they can pay well. Two of every five middle jobs pay $50,000 or more per year.

- In 2009, Brookings Institution researchers Harry J. Holzer and Robert I. Lerman categorized middle-skill jobs as those that required education and training beyond high school but less than a bachelor’s degree. These postsecondary education or training requirements can include associate degrees, vocational certificates and significant on-the-job training. They can even include previous work experience or some college credit, but less than a bachelor’s degree. Holzer and Lerman indicate that typical middle-skill occupations

**Key Terms:**

- **Middle-income jobs:** Jobs paying between $35,000 and $75,000.
- **Middle-skill jobs:** Jobs requiring some level of postsecondary education.
- **Middle jobs:** Jobs requiring postsecondary education and paying in middle-income ranges.

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include clerical, sales, construction, installation/repair, production and transportation/material moving.

- In 2011, Rachael Unruh, a researcher at the National Skills Coalition who developed a report on workforce skills in the American South for the Southern Governors’ Association, defined middle-skill jobs simply as “those that require more than a high school diploma but not a four-year degree.”
- In 2012, The Center on Education and the Workforce at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute defined “middle jobs” as those that require some postsecondary education and training, but not a bachelor’s degree. The center defines “middle-education jobs or workers as those that require or have some postsecondary education and training, but do not require or have a bachelor’s degree.” Middle-class annual income ranges from $35,000 to $75,000. Middle jobs fall in the wage category and require postsecondary training. Middle jobs fall predominately in the income bracket of workers making between $35,000 and $49,999, but some earn more than $75,000. (See Figure 1.)

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, adults with postsecondary education enjoyed increased earnings over those who earned just the high school credential. In 2011, the average earning difference between these groups was $4,600 or 13 percent. For adults who earned an associate degree, the increase was considerably more: $8,100 or 23 percent. Having the education to make the move from low-skill jobs to middle-skill jobs does pay. (See Figure 2.)

**Figure 1**

Percentages of U.S. Jobs by Wages

Numbers of Middle Jobs by Earnings Category, 2012

(Middle job classification is based on education and salary)

Of 139 million (m) jobs in the nation

- 25% Earn $75,000 or more
  - 19.5 m total jobs; 4 m middle jobs
- 23% Earn $50,000 to $74,999
  - 34.8 m total jobs; 11 m middle jobs
- 13% Earn $35,000 to $49,999
  - 32 m total jobs; 14 m middle jobs
- 14% Earn $25,000 to $34,999
- 25% Earn under $25,000

Availability of Jobs for Middle-Skill Workers

According to the National Skills Coalition analysis, it is the vacancies in middle-skill jobs that will be the greatest threat to state economies in the American South.

- In 2009, SREB states showed that resident populations of workers did not have the middle skills to meet the demands of available middle-skill jobs. The typical SREB state has a deficit of 9 percentage points in workers trained for available middle-skill jobs. (See Table 1.)
- SREB states cannot remake their economies from traditional industries unless they can expand both their high- and middle-skill workforces.
- According to current survey results, gaps are greatest in health care, advanced manufacturing, clean energy and information technology.
The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects significant increases in employment by 2020. These projections show that the jobs that will grow the most will require postsecondary education. States will, therefore, need to educate more residents to levels beyond high school to produce individuals who can fill the job needs. Residents needing postsecondary vocational certificates are projected to increase by 17 percent nationwide by 2020, and those needing some college but not necessarily a degree will increase by 18 percent. Likewise, the need for associate degrees will increase by 18 percent. (See Figure 3.)

Table 1
Percentages of Jobs and Workers by Skill Level in SREB States, 2008 and Gap Comparison for Middle-Level, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Jobs by Skill Level</th>
<th>Workers by Skill Level</th>
<th>Gap: Jobs to Workers by Skill Level</th>
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<td></td>
<td>High</td>
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<td>U.S</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<td>SREB states² Median</td>
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<td>Alabama</td>
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<td>West Virginia</td>
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¹The gap is the difference between middle jobs and workers with middle-skill training. The columns used in determining the gap are shown in italic.
²Delaware is not reported here, because the National Skills Coalition did not include it among the states studied.
Source: National Skills Coalition
Figure 3
Projected Increases in Employment and Training Required
United States, 2010 to 2020

Note: Includes both full- and part-time positions and openings due to growth and replacement needs

Section II: Survey of SREB States

Introduction
In response to the challenge that arose from the recession that began in 2008 and the economic and education issues it raised in SREB states, education leaders requested a survey of SREB states. They wanted to know the status of SREB states in educating more of their residents for middle-skill jobs. In response, SREB interviewed postsecondary education and workforce development leaders in 12 SREB states, using a standard set of questions. The questions appear in Section III with summary responses for each question. The names of those interviewed are listed in the Appendix.

Seven major themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews. Nearly all interviewees referenced these themes at some point during the interviews. These themes are discussed below and are followed by a summary of the responses to the individual questions.
Seven Themes on Workforce Development Related to Middle-Skill Jobs

1. Meeting Needs: The Crux of the Matter

Leaders in every state declared the necessity of identifying industry needs for middle-skill workers and then building certificate and degree programs around those needs. But identifying needs — and the related skills — is difficult. Even when researchers define the middle skills and middle-skill jobs, they resort to education attainment measures instead of what workers need to know and be able to do.

Many interviewees relayed anecdotes, some in vivid detail, about business and industry having difficulty knowing specifically what they needed or being able to project a year ahead — when students would be finished with their studies. Human resources officers were often out of touch with their own floor supervisors about what skills were relevant. Vacancy projections for local plants got supplanted in six months by new strategic plans in corporate headquarters several states away. So, they asked, “How could two-year colleges plan to meet business and industry needs in a constantly changing environment?”

A North Carolina Community College System study showed just how complex it is to plan an education response to workforce development for middle-skill jobs. The study showed the issue has at least four components. First, insufficient numbers of students may be interested in areas of need. Second, training programs may not be geographically located where jobs are located. Third, jobs may exist, but colleges may not offer programs that lead to the jobs. And finally, hiring practices — such as requirements for experience or credit background checks — can create barriers for graduates of community colleges.

Some SREB states have turned to regional models to help with planning. Oklahoma and Tennessee have developed strong regional plans with goals. Tennessee implemented the plans first in the Middle Tennessee Region and will use that effort as the model for moving out across the state. Alabama and Arkansas designated regions within their economic development efforts. For example, in 2005 five community colleges in eastern Arkansas created the Arkansas Delta Training and Education Consortium (ADTEC), which leverages collective resources to address current and future training needs of business and industry. In Alabama, the regional councils can make decisions about funding their own activities. In several states, including Georgia, South Carolina and West Virginia, two-year colleges are charged with developing regional partnerships with business and industry.

SREB states have recently turned to a broader planning model with good success — one referred to as sector strategies. The model encourages planning for workforce development around larger clusters of business and industry groups. Rather than focusing on single business/college partnerships, the states encourage multiple businesses in a single industrial category to work together through a Workforce Development Council. The council identifies the needs the overall industry will require in an area and then works with local education agencies to ensure the total educational pipeline is geared to filling the need for workers. Because the research and analysis is more systematic and the partnership encompasses more than one business, students have multiple chances for jobs, and colleges can plan with more confidence. Arkansas, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina and Oklahoma have all developed sector strategies related to industries in their states.
The Texas Workforce Commission created an Internet-based analysis tool, the Strategic Workforce Assessment Program, designed to simplify the complex challenge of identifying the necessary skills and training programs related to any industry cluster or sector across the state. The program organizes and analyzes labor market data to help assess education and employment prospects. Output provides users with actionable information, including customized cluster staffing patterns, extensive occupational characteristics data, supply and demand profiles, and skills gap analysis based on detailed work activities to inform a wide range of training investment decisions.

2. Leadership

SREB states that described the most organized and seemingly successful workforce development initiatives were ones that described strong leadership. State leaders indicated that leadership comes not only from the clear sense of direction that individuals or organizations in the state can provide for workforce development. It also comes in the form of a well-publicized, comprehensive strategic plan that can be used throughout the state as a guide. In other states, where the workforce development effort was just beginning, interview respondents seemed unable to identify a single plan or person guiding the efforts to develop middle-skill jobs. In all states, the governor leads the workforce development effort, and many are directly involved in the related education efforts. For example, the governor of North Carolina created five committees to look at various education-related issues. One of the committees focused on talent and workforce development to ensure the state can meet current and future market demand for employees.

3. Partnerships

Partnerships between state workforce development offices, two-year colleges, local business and major industries have taken many shapes in SREB states. They vary from formal regional partnerships with financially autonomous boards, to state workforce development conferences that invite major industry to partner with two-year and technical colleges to sharpen their recruitment efforts, to local business roundtables that invite two-year and technical college officials to hear the needs and concerns of local businesses.

Some states described a tightly aligned relationship between two-year and technical colleges and the K-12 system as essential to the development of middle-skill jobs. Students in all SREB states have the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment programs while in high school. In many states, dual enrollment or similar opportunities are a vital steppingstone for students who will go on to pursue middle-skill jobs through further two-year or technical college training.

Strong partnerships also help states respond effectively to disruptive events — whether natural disasters or economic ones. Louisiana credits these partnerships with helping the state respond...
in a more rapid and coordinated fashion to the effects of these disruptive events on workforce and the economy.

Because they are embedded within communities, two-year and technical colleges are often uniquely well-attuned to the needs of local business and industry. Many SREB states described these institutions as valuable community partners that are flexible and responsive to changing local labor demands and able to adjust their curriculum offerings accordingly. For example, in Georgia and Louisiana, the technical college systems are confident that their institutions are meeting the skill demands of the workplace that they guarantee the success of their graduates. If a graduate of an institution is found to lack a skill needed in the workplace, the employer can send the employee back to the institution free of charge for retraining.

4. Communicating the Value of Middle-Skill Jobs to Students and Parents

For years, the prevailing message pressed on middle grades and high school students nationwide has been “stay in school, graduate and go to college” to earn a four-year degree. As a result, more students are pursuing four-year degrees. Research reveals, however, that the job market is flooded with four-year graduates who are ill equipped to meet the current needs of business and industry. If these students are not well-suited for the workforce and cannot readily find employment, they become frustrated and discontent. For most students, pursuing a bachelor’s degree (or higher) means taking on student-loan debt. For today’s students, levels of debt are higher than ever. If they are unable to find work, they cannot repay their debts — an economic problem for them and for the general public.

Nearly all states described the lack of confidence that most parents of K-12 students have in middle jobs as career options for their children. They do not understand the relevance and value of these careers, the financial stability such careers can offer, and the ready availability of work in these kinds of jobs in the community. Middle-skill careers are, according to the interviewees, seen as low-paying and unglamorous. As one interviewee put it, “Too many parents still see these jobs as their grandparents’ jobs.” They do not understand that some new jobs carrying old titles have evolved tremendously in the age of technology. As a result, the volume of potential students in the pipeline interested in these areas — and ultimately working in these jobs — is low — and does not meet workforce demand.

In Arkansas, data analysts with the Arkansas Research Center have demonstrated that graduates of two-year or certificate programs earn more in their first years of employment after graduation than their bachelor’s degree-graduate counterparts. Although those who have earned bachelor’s degrees eventually earn more, the immediate stability of a middle-skill career is an important asset that states have a hard time explaining to students and their parents. The fact that the credentials associated with this training can be “stacked” and can grow to higher credentials needs to be better communicated so parents and students realize these jobs can be building blocks to other jobs.

5. Credentialing and Stacking Credentials

SREB states indicated that developing ways to assess and credential skills is important. Alabama provides students with transcripts of their skills that the students can show to potential employers. Some states provide registries for posting student certifications once students have completed industry certification. Maryland does this for the construction industry. Kentucky
certifies whole communities as “workforce-ready” and uses workforce skills assessments as part of the readiness index. Related to credentialing skills, SREB states are interested in stacking credentials, both skills-related and academic, so that students can have a pathway to higher credentials throughout their careers. The idea is that once students earn “baseline credentials,” perhaps by passing industry exams or gaining academic credits for military experience through prior learning assessments, they can build on these. They might bundle these experiences with others to earn a “higher” credential that would be recognized in the marketplace. If a series of such credentials can be steppingstones on a career pathway, more adults would be moved further along in skills development and academic attainment — one step at a time. The key, however, is that the credentials need to be hierarchical: more rigorous, leading to greater skill — not lateral, leading to another skill. Louisiana incorporates stacked credentials in its two-year curricula.

6. Data

State data systems enable states to track students from the K-12 system into higher education and then the workforce. More sophisticated systems give states the capacity to track their students across state lines and enable data-sharing between states. The capacity for tracking students into the workplace also enables states to make precise data-based decisions about program funding and curriculum. By analyzing the needs of local or regional industry compared with the labor-market availability of graduates in the area, states can respond to needs or surpluses with adjustments to local criteria. States also can use these data to communicate precisely what kind of labor is available, where that labor is located, and what skills the workforce possesses to industries interested in doing business in that state. In one example, workforce development officials in Alabama are using data to retain and retrain laid-off workers. Data enables them to identify quickly which industries experience shortages and effectively retrain laid-off workers to fill those open jobs. This practice helps the state keep companies that are experiencing labor shortages from moving to a new market in another state, and it helps state workers from experiencing a long period of unemployment or a move to another state to find work.

7. Incentives to Keep Students in School: Earn and Learn

Many SREB states identified “earn and learn” programs as a good strategy for attracting postsecondary students to programs, retaining them to program completion, and providing them with relevant work experiences as part of programs. These strategies are one solution to two problems facing workforce development education. They provides incentives for students to enter the programs by providing immediate employment while the students go to school. They also continue to give students reasons to stay, as students continue to receive both a paycheck and a valuable education. Many states also are reconsidering apprenticeship programs and co-op style programs for technical studies.

Louisiana leaders indicated their frustration with employers who want to hire students right from the classroom before the students could finish their studies. Demand is so high in certain fields that employers are willing to employ under-trained individuals. As a solution for all parties, the state is considering developing an agreement between employers, colleges and students that will have the employer pay wages to students and support their completion of school.
Section III: Summary of Survey Findings

The 14 survey questions, along with state responses in summary form, are shown below. In some cases, the summaries incorporate the responses of more than one interviewee from a given state. (See the Appendix for a list of interviewees by state.)

Although question 7 had five parts, each part required separate responses, so the parts are shown separately below as questions 7A through 7E.

Because responses to questions 8 and 14 and questions 11 and 12 were highly related, their responses were merged.

1. Does your state have a formal agenda or plan addressing workforce development as it relates to careers that specifically includes two-year degrees, certificates or industry certification exams?

Many interviewees responding to questions about planning workforce development discussed their work with Complete College America. This initiative requires states to collect standard data and set goals for producing postsecondary certificates and degrees. Eleven SREB states joined Complete College America’s Alliance of States: Arkansas, Florida, Georgia Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. Two additional SREB states — North Carolina and Virginia — collected information about postsecondary completion.

Figure 4
SREB States in the Complete College America Initiative

Source: Complete College America
The SREB interviews asked state leaders about state-level planning on workforce development other than their activities related to Complete College America. Only a few states indicated they had a statewide economic development or workforce plan other than their Complete College America activities.

- **All interviewed SREB states reported having workforce development or strategic plans, generally directed by their governors.**

  - **In Alabama,** the Department of Commerce initiates the overarching plan for workforce development under the direction of the governor. The department developed the *Accelerate Alabama Plan,* directing industry recruitment, retention and retraining. Using partners in the K-12 and community college systems, Alabama has been successful at bringing industry sectors into the state and keeping them. Its K-12 agency works with students as early as the middle grades on career opportunities, and the community college system matches the skills that business and industry need with the programs that the colleges offer to ensure the students and industries get the latest skills and information.

  - **In Arkansas,** the governor developed and coordinated a statewide economic development plan six years ago based on regional activity. It calls on community colleges to help with regional development by building plans with regional business and industry. One outcome was the adoption of ACT’s Career Readiness Certificate. The state can assess residents to determine their readiness on various skills; it can thereby streamline the recruitment process when specific skills are needed for startup of new initiatives.

  - **Delaware’s** 2012 strategic workforce plan is built around an integrated workforce development approach that starts with K-12 schools. The developmental years focus on four specific skills: STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), thinking, workplace, and citizenship. Student graduation rates are expected to improve, and students are expected to move to postsecondary education and/or training by several tracks including (but not limited to) Delaware’s University system, Delaware’s Technical Community College, and other professional or trades training programs.

  - **Florida’s** 2010-2015 strategic plan for workforce development, *Creating the Strategy for Today’s Needs and Tomorrow’s Talent,* is a product of Workforce Florida, the Agency for Workforce Innovation, and the state’s 24 regional workforce boards. The plan contains six strategic goals and 39 achievements that are aligned with talent priorities of key partners in business and economic development, including the Florida Chamber Foundation and Enterprise Florida Inc.

  - **Georgia’s** workforce development plan, *Georgia Integrated State Plan,* developed by the Workforce Investment Board, is integrated for all state agencies and is led by the governor.

  - **Kentucky’s** work is organized by the Economic Development Cabinet, which developed the *Work Smart Kentucky* plan with four clear goals: to align with the state’s economic development goals, to align with the state’s education goals, to simplify the system, and to make the system more customer-friendly. The plan has 25 initiatives, some of which are related to middle-skill jobs. Kentucky also has an economic development campaign, called Unbridled Kentucky, and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) has a program called Accelerating Opportunity, which focuses on the 12-hour certificate. All of these plans complement each other.

  - **The Louisiana** Community & Technical College System (LCTCS) has a formal agenda, which addresses the workforce development needs of business and industry. The LCTCS works in coordinated partnership with business and industry, Louisiana Workforce Commission, Louisiana Economic Development, the Board of Regents, the Louisiana Department of Education and others. The Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) has a strategic plan that supports the expansion of top-
demand careers, including many requiring associate degrees and industry certification. Louisiana’s Demand-Driven Workforce Investment Plan covers LWC activities and goals for 2012 to 2017.

- **Maryland’s** governor issued a strategic plan that included a nationwide skills initiative, *Skills2Compete*.

- In **Mississippi**, the State Workforce Investment Board created a strategic plan entitled Mississippi 2020 Vision Working Together, which serves as a tool to help attract, keep and grow high-quality jobs in the state. Additionally, the Mississippi Legislature created the Educational Achievement Council in 2010 with the stated goal “to work toward increasing the education attainment and skill levels of the state’s working-age population benchmark to the national average by 2025.”

- Under the governor’s direction, the **Oklahoma** Department of Commerce identifies both industries that are economic drivers and occupations within those industries that are in demand. This information is made public through a report, Inspire Oklahoma, and it is provided to the postsecondary system as a planning tool for program development and for evaluating and expanding workforce programs.

- In **Texas**, the *Strategic Plan for Texas Public Community Colleges* is the state’s consolidated plan for the state’s 50 community colleges. The plan lays out the goals, objectives and strategies that community colleges will use to support regional economic development, as well as the workforce efforts focused on helping the state close gaps and meet the goals in the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board plan for the state – *Closing the Gaps by 2015*.

- **Virginia’s** goals are set by the governor, but its strategic plan, Achieve 2015, was issued by its community college system.

### 2. Is there one entity in your state responsible for coordinating all workforce development activity: that is, overseeing activities of all the education systems and various state agencies (and any other key stakeholder) to address industry and workforce needs?

Because all states have multiple agencies involved in workforce development efforts — education systems, an economic development agency, an investment board, and engagement with business and industry — effective coordination is essential. Only a few SREB states have identified a single entity to coordinate all workforce development activity in the state to ensure goals are met effectively.

- **Four states had statewide coordination of workforce development, generally through a governor’s council.**

  - **Arkansas’s** governor established a Governor’s Workforce Council. The state also has the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, which works along with local community colleges and industry in the various regions in developing plans. The Arkansas community college association works with the state director of economic development to ensure communication and full use of existing structures.

  - **Georgia** has a Governor’s Office for Workforce Development, but multiple entities are responsible for workforce development.

  - In **Maryland**, the Governor’s Workforce Investment Board is the single entity that oversees workforce development. It is housed in the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulations. Eight cabinet secretaries (K-12 and higher education, juvenile justice, veteran affairs, disabilities, human resources, business, and economic development) sit on the Board.

  - The Workforce Planning Council coordinates workforce efforts in **West Virginia**, and plans are underway for the governor to become the chair of the Planning Council. All the education agencies in
the state are represented on the council, which also includes representation from the economic development and workforce investment agencies.

- **In other states, workforce development was coordinated by one or more lead agencies.**
  - **In Alabama,** multiple agencies are involved in workforce development. The Alabama Career Center System oversees the federal Workforce Investment System. The community college system is the key agency in state coordination. Through their Workforce Development Division, the community colleges oversee Regional Workforce Development Councils. Alabama has 10 such business-led councils, with members that include representatives from K-12 and community colleges.
  - **In Delaware,** the Department of Labor and its partner, the Delaware Workforce Investment Board, strive to work together to help Delaware businesses build a strong and successful workforce.
  - **In Florida,** Workforce Florida, along with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity and the state’s 24 regional workforce boards coordinate workforce development. Together, they work at the state and local level to collaborate with the public sector and business to shape policy and investments with the aim of bolstering employment, training and economic development. Workforce Florida is the statewide workforce investment board charged with policy setting and oversight of the workforce system. It is governed by a 47-member board of directors, chaired by the lieutenant governor.
  - **In Kentucky,** the Workforce Investment Board is the governance advisory board. The secretaries of economic development, K-12 and higher education, and education and workforce development sit on the Board.
  - **The Louisiana Workforce Commission,** through its Workforce Investment Council, coordinates workforce development policy for state agencies. The Council includes state agency heads and representatives of private industry and labor. Its role is to ensure Louisiana’s workforce and education systems are aligned with state workforce needs. WIC has a strategic plan that sets out six strategic goals: increasing the labor force participation rate; implementing an accountability system for workforce development; developing a system for forecasting and communicating workforce demand and identifying workforce education and training needs; increasing the high school graduation rate; increasing the education attainment of the state’s adult population; and aligning postsecondary resources with workforce needs. Several of the governor’s cabinet secretaries constitute an informal group known as the “workforce cabinet.” The heads of the commission, LCTCS, Louisiana Economic Development, the Board of Regents and the Department of Education meet about strategy to grow and strengthen Louisiana’s workforce.
  - **Mississippi’s** State Workforce Investment Board works to consolidate and strengthen the state's workforce development system and make it more efficient, customer-friendly and demand-driven. The board has developed and implemented a statewide performance management system, the Integrated Longitudinal Education and Workforce Performance Management System. This system allows for the collection and analysis of education, training, and placement data across all public workforce and education service providers throughout Mississippi, including the community and two-year college system.
  - **In Oklahoma,** the Department of Commerce coordinates workforce development efforts. The Workforce Oklahoma Initiative provides one-stop career and service centers that offer a variety of career, training, job search and support services. The centers combine numerous state offices and agencies including community colleges, area career-technical schools, adult basic education and the Department of Commerce.
  - **South Carolina** has a variety of partnerships in the state that organize and structure workforce planning for the state. The South Carolina Technical College System and K-12 school systems, as well
as readySC (a division of the South Carolina Technical College System) and Apprenticeship Carolina all play a role in shaping programs.

- **In Texas**, the Texas Workforce Commission is primarily responsible for workforce efforts, but many state agencies, including the Texas Veteran’s Commission, the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, and the juvenile and adult corrections systems are responsible for specific areas of workforce development. The Texas Workforce Investment Council, coordinated through the governor’s office and comprised of various agency heads, serves as the advisory body for all state efforts.

- **In some states the work is coordinated by a higher education agency.**
  - The **Tennessee** Board of Regents Office coordinates much of the work through the community colleges in conjunction with the local chambers of commerce and workforce investment boards in the three regions of the state. The Middle Tennessee effort has become effective, and the state will likely adopt its model in the other two regions of the state.
  - **Virginia** has two entities that oversee workforce development. One works on education and workforce development and is headed by a chief workforce officer, who acts as liaison between all workforce programs under commerce and trade, health and human services, education and (more recently) veterans affairs. The other, a workforce council, serves as the governor’s workforce development advisor; it makes recommendations to the governor on workforce policy and budget — including such policy issues as middle grades and high school career-technical education, large federally funded employment services for adults, and veteran’s work programs.

3. **Does your state have target goals to increase the number of people who obtain associate degrees or certificates, or pass industry certification exams?**

Fourteen SREB states set specific targets for percentages of state residents completing postsecondary credentials by 2020 as part of their Complete College America commitment. In addition or complementary to that commitment, several states set other targets.

- **Some SREB states set goals in addition to their Complete College America targets, either designating target numbers of credentials or extending the targets to institutions or regions.**
  - While a specific number for an attainment goal does not exist in **Alabama**, there are several broad guidelines. Through Perkins activities, the state has developed achievement goals related to that specific stream of funding. Likewise, Alabama has a general goal in its current budget proposal to increase the number of people who obtain certificates and degrees so that more enter training or adult education programs over the course of the next fiscal year.
  - **Arkansas** has set a goal to double the number of degrees and certificates by 2025.
  - **Georgia** has set goals at the institution level for its technical colleges that are similar to those of Complete College America.
  - In **Louisiana**, the initial average starting salary for associate degree graduates is nearly $3,000 higher than bachelor’s degree graduates, predominately because of the large number of health care and engineering technology graduates produced at the associate degree level.
  - In **Mississippi**, the 2010 Legislature created the Educational Achievement Council with the goal “to work toward increasing the education attainment and skill levels of the state’s working-age population benchmark to the national average by 2025.” Then in 2013, the Legislature created targets for the state’s community colleges that include performance measures for a 2 percent increase in the number of credit degrees and certificates awarded (based on 2009-10 enrollment)
and a 2 percent increase in the licensure exam pass rate for those trained in jobs that require state
and/or national licensure (based on 2009-10 enrollment).

- In **North Carolina**, the community college system has a goal to increase the number of students
  who complete certificates and associate degrees.

- **Tennessee** developed a program called Drive to 55. Tennessee calculated that it will need 55
  percent of its residents to have a postsecondary certificate or degree by 2025 to meet its needs. Based
  on that percentage, colleges, universities and technology centers set their goals to help the state meet
  the overall goal, and the Board of Regents System will ensure that the targets are met.

- **Texas** has set of goal of increasing the number of degrees, certificates and other identifiable student
  successes from high-quality programs by 50 percent by 2015.

- As part of its Top Jobs 2011 legislation, **Virginia** set a goal of adding an additional 100,000
  bachelor’s and associate degrees by 2015.

- **Other states developed programs that would help increase credentials.**
  - **Kentucky** launched Work Ready Communities to identify communities with work-ready residents.
    These communities agree to measure the work readiness of their residents and set standards for
    “work-ready” and “work-ready progress” in relation to communities. Measures include education
    attainment, broadband access, soft-skills certificates and community engagement in the process.
  - **Maryland** set an overarching goal to increase the enrollments in credit-bearing programs in its
    community colleges by 20 percent by 2018. It also set sub-goals, including completion goals for
    completion of industry certification and associate degrees.
  - **South Carolina** is part of the ACT work-ready communities’ initiative, and 100 percent of its
    counties are engaged. Communities receive the recognition when they achieve goals for individuals
    earning ACT’s National Career Readiness Certificate and for businesses that recognize, prefer or
    recommend the certificate.
  - By 2015, **Texas** set a goal to award 210,000 undergraduate degrees, certificates and other
    identifiable student successes from high-quality programs.
  - **Virginia** developed a report card on workforce development for its more than 20 programs. It
    developed metrics to measure progress in economic development terms, and it identified data that
    would show what its programs and agencies were producing. The report card is designed to provide
    results for the state and for its planning regions.
  - **West Virginia** has an initiative to embed industry-recognized certification into certificates and
    associate degree programs.

4. **How has your state demonstrated to employers that individuals completing associate
degrees or certificates are qualified for middle-skill jobs?**

States report that they regularly use panels of industry representatives to help them build and review
programs. These partnerships with industry ensure that programs are always current. Many states
also reported that they use employer satisfaction surveys. These are used to determine if businesses
believe that recently hired graduates are functioning satisfactorily in their new jobs.

- **Several states have incorporated third-party credentialing such as industry
certifications in their programs, along with other strategies to align with employer-
stated needs.**
  - **Alabama’s** community colleges incorporate national third-party credentials for all fields of study to
    applicable programs. Alabama has used ACT’s WorkKeys Career Readiness Certificate since 2005-
with the career rating as credentials. The state uses its own Career Rating Credential. All high school seniors will have this career rating as a credential in addition to their career-technical courses. Alabama records this information in a database for every student, so it can inform economic developers and other peoples what skill levels individuals have, and it can report on the overall skill-levels by community. In addition, Alabama uses a standardized curriculum throughout the state. This standardization simplifies transfer and ensures that all students have access to the material.

- **Maryland** requires career-tech students at both the secondary and postsecondary levels to earn industry certification if it is available in that program area. This guarantees that students have industry-recognized skills. For example, Maryland’s high school construction programs provide instruction organized by the National Center for Construction Education and Research.

- In **Mississippi**, business and industry members serve on statewide curriculum development and revision teams to provide input on students’ desired skills and competencies. The Mississippi Community College Board is also assisting the state’s community colleges in moving many of their programs to national industry certifications. Students must demonstrate technical skill attainment by passing a statewide assessment before moving into the workforce.

- The **North Carolina** Community College System emphasizes third-party credentials as a way to validate graduates’ competencies.

- **Oklahoma** has a career-readiness certificate program and offers the Oklahoma Career Readiness Certificate (OKCRC), which is a type of skills transcript. The OKCRC uses nationally recognized assessments to measure skills and provide a common language between educators, businesses and community members.

- **Tennessee** requires that all workforce programs meet outside industry accreditation or licensure standards if they are applicable.

- **Virginia** is working to increase the percentage of community college programs that are aligned with national skill standards and that will allow students to obtain national credentials.

- **Arkansas** can track every student by degree or certificate to the employment database and compare the wages of students earning various credentials. Students in 2008 and 2009 who had a one-year technical certificate made a salary 102 percent of those who had a bachelor’s degree right out of school.

- **Georgia’s** technical colleges guarantee the success of their graduates in the workplace within three years of graduation. If an employee is found to lack a skill needed in their workplace, their employer can refer that employee back to the school for free retraining.

- In **Louisiana**, the LCTCS has instituted a Day One Guarantee that permits an employer who finds that a graduate’s skills are deficient to have the person retrained for free. LCTCS faces a very significant issue from industry: the hiring of a high number of students right out of the classroom before they complete programs that prepare them for high-demand occupations. (This is a more common problem with students in associate degree programs than in bachelor’s degree programs.) This is one of the biggest obstacles to getting sufficient numbers of students through programs to graduation for some high-demand jobs.

- **Oklahoma** recognizes best practices for education and industry partnerships at special events like the conference of the Oklahoma Association of Community Colleges. With its partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank, the collaboration focuses not just on celebrating success but on working out challenges. Oklahoma has hosted annual awards ceremonies for eight years, to which institutions bring one partner each year.
• **Tennessee** believes that outside peer review, licensure or certification helps to ensure quality. Post-graduation job placement and transfer to four-year programs are criteria in the state’s performance-based funding model. When students do not get placed in program-relevant jobs or when they remain unemployed, it reflects negatively on the program in the funding model. Tennessee is working on reverse transfer with the four-year institutions, both public and private. This practice will provide two-year college students who transferred before completing associate degrees to receive degrees once they complete sufficient credits at a four-year college. All of this information is reported to the regional workforce board.

• In **Texas**, each public college has advisory committees for its career and technical education programs. Business and industry representatives participate in those advisory committees. Additionally, *Advancing Texas: Strategic Plan for the Texas Workforce System, FY 2010-FY 2015* includes an action item to gather data from employer customers to determine employer needs and satisfaction.

➢ **States noted particular challenges in meeting needs of employers.**

• **Arkansas** leaders reported that they have had a significant problem in trying to meet the needs that industries have identified. Often, industry representatives have trouble predicting their needs far enough in advance to give student time to complete a program of study. Or, business leaders tell a college they know their own needs, but in fact, they have not been able to predict their needs accurately to help the college plan. Arkansas now has a workforce training consortium as part of its sector strategy, and it works with its workforce development staff on every campus, combining the efforts of multiple colleges to meet needs. The consortium has been effective in working in aerospace and green technologies. The community and technical college system has received two grants to work as a consortium of institution in assessing needs.

• **Louisiana** has a problem in some high-demand programs. Job demand is so high that some employers want to hire students right out of the classroom before the students can finish their programs. This practice is one of the biggest challenges in maintaining the completion pipeline. The technical colleges have proposed a plan that would ask employers to enter an agreement with the colleges. They would hire the student prematurely only if they would agree to support the students through completion of the program.

• **West Virginia** works with employers at the front end of the process to determine need, and then develops the programs. It uses a sector-based approach to workforce development.

5. **Is your state experiencing any difficulties producing the numbers of students it needs for two-year and certificate-specific careers in science, health and technology?**

➢ **Some SREB states noted areas of need for STEM positions.**

Several states noted that business and industry have difficulty indicating what they need from technical and community colleges, and they often ask for more or different training than they need. When the colleges looked more closely at industry needs, they found that students could gain needed competencies that industry expected through shorter-term courses if the courses were appropriately targeted. Institutions are now trying to better match needs and outcomes, and then modify the program to meet industry needs.

• **Alabama** has a significant deficit of engineers — and the problem has been getting students through the entire education pipeline and into the industry. Issues with transfer of course credit from technical to collegiate programs, as well as program accreditation, have severed the pipeline at key places, making the transition for students difficult.
• **Arkansas** has a shortage in nursing and is working to improve the number of RNs. The state increased the number of available clinical sites to train RNs, and it created partnership among the state’s rural colleges for an LPN-to-RN program to help rural Arkansas. Advance manufacturing jobs are in high demand in Arkansas. Welding jobs are in particular shortage because of a surge in the pipeline industry within the state. Workers for the aerospace industry are also in demand. Arkansas used grant funding to expand offerings; for example, it formed a consortium in Central Arkansas to create a common flexible curriculum and use equipment efficiently — all based on business specialties.

• **In Delaware,** nearly four times as many jobs are open in STEM fields as there are unemployed workers in the state. In response, the governor created the Delaware STEM Council to evaluate the status of STEM education and recommend ways to improve it. The council has three goals: (1) expand the number of students who ultimately pursue advanced degrees and careers in STEM fields and broaden the participation of women and minorities in these fields; (2) expand the STEM-capable workforce to create, grow and attract STEM related businesses to the state; and (3) increase STEM literacy for all Delaware students, including those who pursue non-STEM related careers but need STEM skills.

• **Louisiana** has a robust demand for jobs requiring science, technology, engineering or math skills, and the state is taking strategic steps to raise capacity to supply new workers for these jobs. It is growing in the digital media and software industry. The energy and petrochemical sectors are rapidly driving up demand for STEM workers. Louisiana estimates shortages in a range of health care areas ranging from a low of 30,000 currently to a high of 60,000, not accounting for attrition. A 2013 Brookings Institution study found that the Baton Rouge metropolitan area ranks high in the nation in jobs that do not require a bachelor’s degree but do require strong science and math skills. The state is attacking the high school dropout rate, improving its occupational forecasting tools, and improving the alignment of its education and training institutions to the occupational forecast.

• The **North Carolina** Community College System conducted a pilot study that showed that the middle-skill gap issue is comprised of four components that make it complex. The components include an interest gap (not enough students enrolling in manufacturing or STEM programs), a geography gap (college has a training program and is producing highly skilled individuals, but there are no jobs in the college’s service region), a training gap (jobs exist, but the college does not offer the appropriate program), and a human resources-induced gap (policies or hiring procedures that create barriers for graduates of community colleges, such as years of experience or credit background checks).

• For **Oklahoma,** the deficit lies in many industries, including the manufacturing sector. The demand is not there for students entering these programs and fields. The state is focusing on campaigns and marketing initiatives to make students and their parents aware of opportunities and growth potential in these STEM sectors.

• Manufacturing is the deficit area in **South Carolina.** The disconnect is related to a lack of demand, which is worsened by a K-12 education pipeline that does not give specific direction to non-college-bound high school students.

• **Tennessee** needs more candidates in health information, or health informatics. The state also reports that information technology, advanced manufacturing and mechatronics are areas of shortage.

• **Virginia** has shortages in health care. It also reports shortages in middle-skill jobs in aerospace and advanced manufacturing industries.
Some states reported programs to promote student interest in middle-skill jobs where they have shortages:

- **Alabama** and **Georgia** have each developed a Go Build Initiative. This effort is a marketing campaign aimed at getting high school students and their parents interested in the career-technical pipeline by dispelling rumors related to middle-skill jobs professions.
- **Maryland** has created a new program for certain industries with known shortages, called Employment Advancement Right Now — EARN. Through this program, Maryland provides training funds for partnerships for individuals to get a credential or learn an identifiable skill to allow them to get a new employment position, promotion or wage advancement.
- **Virginia** noted that it is often difficult to get students interested in middle-skill jobs even when the pay is fair and the demand is progressive. Increasing student interest means driving down into the high school and middle grades to work with parents to promote the opportunities of these jobs: good wages, promotion and potential for advancement in education.
- **West Virginia** has designed "learn and earn" programs patterned after traditional co-op programs, in partnership with employers, to try to attract students to shortage areas. One program partners with a chemical company and another with an automotive company. The state pays half the student’s wages. West Virginia also has a 50-50 match program built into the West Virginia Promise Scholarship program for community college students. Technical school scholars in these programs receive scholarships funded in part by industries in the job sector matched by state funding.

6. **Are there any institutions and/or agencies in your state that participate in industry recruitment efforts?**

Many states, including Georgia, Louisiana and South Carolina, have startup training efforts they offer new businesses and industries as an incentive to move into a state. These are variously “QuickStart,” “FastStart” or something similar. In addition to this kind of program, state leaders pointed to other approaches to state recruitment efforts for industry.

A few SREB states have unified industry recruitment efforts.

- **Alabama**’s state incentive development training organization participates in industry recruitment efforts. This organization is responsible for recruiting, screening and providing preliminary training for skilled workers. After basic job training, the employee is placed within the industry, and this is the point where the state workforce development office (in partnership with the Alabama Technology Network Partners) steps in to provide more on-the-job training that is company-specific.
- **In Georgia**, multiple agencies play a role in industry recruitment. These include the Technical College System, the state Department of Economic Development, and the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development.
- **Louisiana** Economic Development (LED) is the lead agency for industry recruitment. LED works closely with LCTCS and other entities across Louisiana to achieve its goals, primarily through its Louisiana FastStart workforce preparation program.
- **In Mississippi**, the Mississippi Development Authority participates in industry recruitment efforts.
- **In North Carolina**, the Department of Commerce directs all industry recruitment efforts. The Department of Commerce currently works with public–private partnerships to take over industry recruitment.
• For **Oklahoma**, the Department of Commerce actively recruits new industry opportunities. Through its Business, Retention and Expansion area, the department brings national and international businesses into the state. Because the Economic Development Council works closely with the state higher education institutions and with employers, it can help ensure that employee training matches the needs of potential new industry recruits to the state.

• In **South Carolina**, the University System (through its Internet, Computer and Resource Education Center), the South Carolina Research Authority, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Employment work together in recruiting industry.

• In **Texas**, the Governor’s Office of Economic Development has primary responsibility. Other agencies are required to participate, and local governments also have a significant role.

• For **Virginia**, a robust multi-agency, multi-business recruitment system, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, primarily recruits new industries to the state. This effort includes the community college systems. Under its Virginia Workforce Council, a standing working group called Career Pathways plays a role, along with nine state-level agencies and more than 20 federal and state-funded programs. At the local school level, community colleges and technical education programs are working to fill the pipeline for employee recruitment.

• The Community and Technical College System in **West Virginia** works with the Economic Development Agency’s Development Office and local workforce groups to attract new industries to the state.

7. **A. Has your state used labor market analysis to identify the industry clusters or sectors that make up a significant proportion of potential employment in middle careers across your state? These could include such jobs as health care, transportation or logistics.**

  • All states reported using labor market analysis to identify industry clusters for future employment.

  • **Alabama** conducts regular market analysis through a state-funded partnership with the University of Alabama and relies on labor market information from the state’s Departments of Labor and Commerce to ensure that relevant agencies are on the same page.

  • **Arkansas** is currently identifying various technologies with Spiderware capabilities to look at actual job openings.

  • **Florida** is using real-time data tools to identify the workforce needs of business and industry in the state. In *Roadmap to Florida’s Future*, the state sorted industry clusters into three broad categories related to ongoing and future expansion efforts.

  • In **Georgia**, each technical college commissions a survey of its service delivery area at least once every five years to determine future needs. The results are combined with market data to determine a complete regional market analysis.

  • **Kentucky** produced *Kentucky’s Target Industry Sector*, a 2011 sector analysis report using market data to identify five sectors, along with specific jobs and occupations and their salary ranges, and the credentials required to obtain those jobs.

  • In **Louisiana**, labor market analysis informs the way the community college system allocates its limited program resources.

  • **Maryland**’s career cluster initiative worked with over 350 employers to organize careers and instructional career programs around career clusters, so that the state was able to target the right industries, and so that students would be prepared for opportunities that actually existed.
West Virginia uses a sector-based approach to determine the needs of various industries and businesses across the state. It conducts formal surveys of industry needs, and it conducts end-phase focus groups to validate the survey data. Then it projects industries needs for the future.

7 B. Has your state convened any task forces made up of business leaders, legislators, state workforce board members, education leaders, labor leaders and others to identify and solve workforce challenges?

All states interviewed reported they had task forces or commissions focused on workforce challenges.

- In Alabama, the governor formed the College and Career Ready Task Force to study student preparation for success beyond high school. The task force is comprised of educators from K-12, the two- and four-year colleges, as well as business and industry leaders. The speaker of the Alabama House of Representatives, the Senate president pro tem and the lieutenant governor serve as its co-chairs.

- In Arkansas, the governor formed a workforce training consortium that coordinates with workforce representatives on every two-year campus. The governor’s Dislocated Worker Task Force connects state resources to meet the needs of dislocated workers and employers across the state. To meet the needs of the aerospace industry, the state has formed a training alliance with the Department of Economic Development and Industry.

- In Florida, Workforce Florida, supported by the Agency for Workforce Innovation and Florida’s 24 regional workforce boards, collaborated with leaders in business, education and economic development, among others, to develop and publish the state’s five-year strategic plan for workforce development: Creating the Strategy for Today’s Needs and Tomorrow’s Talent.

- In Georgia, the governor established the Georgia Competitiveness Taskforce, which held meetings around the state to determine the needs of business and industry and determine how education could meet those needs. The taskforce later published its findings.

- In Kentucky, the governor’s recent listening session with 25 small and medium-sized businesses has provided critical information for a summary report that is serving as the foundation for Kentucky’s work in advanced manufacturing.

- In Louisiana, the state’s Workforce Commission was completely re-worked in 2008 to increase its effectiveness. A group of state agency heads formed the Workforce Cabinet, which meets regularly to examine goals, workforce issues and data as it relates to workforce needs. The state created a task force of the Workforce Investment Council to study specific jobs. Currently, the focus is on jobs in the construction industry. Louisiana credits the Workforce Commission for enabling the state to respond rapidly and in a coordinated fashion to natural and economic disasters that impact the state’s workforce and economy.

- In Maryland, the Governor’s Workforce Investment Board has led a number of industry sector task forces in health care, construction, information technology and aerospace, which addresses education issues associated with the recruitment and retention of teachers and faculty at higher education institutions.

- In 2012, Oklahoma created the Strategic Five-Year Workforce Investment Plan (2012–2017). The Science and Technology Council published OneOklahoma, a strategic plan for STEM development across the state. In 2013, the state released its economic development plan.

- In South Carolina, the governor convened a higher education task force, focusing on the Technical College System and manufacturing. The state also formed the South Carolina Aerospace Task Force.
Advisory Council to advise the Secretary of Commerce on the development of a strategic initiative to enhance and grow the state’s aerospace industry.

- The governor of **Tennessee** has held several round-table discussions across the state of Tennessee with business and industry leaders. Representatives of the community colleges and technology centers were also present.

- In **Texas**, the governor’s target industry cluster initiative launched in 2004 and involves employers and stakeholders for six significant economic clusters in Texas: (1) advanced technologies and manufacturing, (2) advanced aerospace and defense, (3) biotechnology and life sciences, (4) information and computer technology, (5) petroleum refining and chemical products, and (6) energy.

- In **Virginia**, the governor has been active in workforce issues. He convened a Higher Education Commission with a subcommittee on workforce education issues. He also created the Rural Jobs Council with members representing the legislature, business, manufacturing, agriculture and health care.

### 7. Has your state recruited and engaged business and industry leaders to help state leaders better understand the strengths, challenges and needs of various industry sectors as it relates to middle careers?

- All states interviewed reported that business and industry leaders have helped them understand the strengths, challenges and needs of various industry sectors.

- Through **Alabama**’s Career Technical Education Advisory Group (representing both secondary and postsecondary education), every quarter the state focuses on an industry cluster, involving approximately 12 businesses; the advisory group discusses issues such as supply and demand in the sector and skills needed for involvement.

- **Arkansas** hosted a state forum with business and industry to discuss workforce needs and development. The business and industry panel indicated that it believed the state needs to continue to improve technology, operations and efficiency. The state realizes that it needs more plumbers, pipe fitters, welders and others in the middle-skill areas.

- **Kentucky** has been involved with SREB’s Preparation for Tomorrow program (renamed Advanced Career), building a secondary education pathway in informatics. The state also has taken on advanced manufacturing, based on work begun in Georgia. The Kentucky Association of Manufacturers has been critical in involving the business community in developing the curriculum for these programs.

- In **Oklahoma**, several years ago the Regents’ Office rolled out the Making Place Matter project for institutions to develop regional partnerships and discuss their various needs.

- In **South Carolina**, the Technical College System, the State Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Commerce discussed what the state needs to do to address the interchange between the needs of business and industry.

- In **Tennessee**, the governor engaged a business leader from Knoxville as a special consultant to higher education on workforce in businesses and industries. He heads up the governor’s Drive to 55 campaign, which is focused on getting more people some kind of postsecondary credential and then into the middle-skill jobs.

- In **Virginia**, the state had a summit last year on entrepreneurship, and it will host another this year on employment of people with disabilities. The state is developing a communication plan on middle careers that it hopes will be as successful in attracting adults to postsecondary career programs as its “Race to the GED” plan was several years ago for adults without high school diplomas needing GEDs.
At the high school level, parents and students are often unaware and unappreciative of the career opportunities in middle-skill jobs and the route to education and training for those jobs.

7. **D. Has your state developed a strategic framework or a strategic plan that regional partners can use to guide their regional initiatives?**

➢ Each state reported having some kind of state plan that regional and local partners could use to guide their efforts.

- **Alabama** has a state plan for that effort. It also has regional plans for individual regions that cover regional priorities, needs and target industry sectors.

- **Arkansas’s** governor created a statewide economic development plan that each county used to develop their own plan. The two-year colleges were encouraged to develop regional sector strategies.

- In **Georgia**, the Second Annual Complete College Georgia conference focused on the state’s regions, based on institutions in the technical college system, the university system, public K-12 education and local industry. Each regional group looked at the region’s specific needs and determined steps to improve workforce development.

- In **Florida**, the state is using real-time data tools to identify the workforce needs of business and industry in the state. In the report *Roadmap to Florida’s Future*, the state sorted its industry clusters into three broad categories related to ongoing and future expansion efforts.

- **Kentucky** provided labor market information at a sector strategies institute in 2011. Based on strategies suggested in a toolkit used at the institute, participants focused on regional sector analysis and identified seven critical factors essential to make a regional sector strategy work.

- In **Maryland**, regional planning takes place in two arenas: the State Workforce Investment Board and the local workforce investment boards (such as the one serving the Baltimore Metropolitan District, including the City of Baltimore and the surrounding area).

- A few years ago, the **Oklahoma** Regents Office published *Making Place Matter* (based on its project of that name) to help the institutions develop regional partnerships and address regional needs. Since then, the northeastern and southwest regional partnerships have created and hired staff that organize and report on their progress toward their regional goals.

- In **Tennessee**, the state directed what components, goal, and benchmarks need to be included in strategic planning for the state. These have been implemented first in the Middle Tennessee region, and they will be expanded to the other two regions of the state.

- In **Texas**, the state has engaged regional partners through local board planning and college initiatives.

- **Virginia** has undertaken strategic planning in some regions of the state. Agency leaders in technical education and workforce development have worked toward a long term, multi-agency, multi-program communications and marketing plan to promote middle-skill jobs.

7. **E. Has your state established regional initiatives or partnerships with industry that focus on meeting skilled workforce needs at the regional level?**

➢ Each state reported that it had established regional initiatives or partnership with industry that focused on meeting skilled workforce needs.

- Since 2007, **Alabama** has had advisory Regional Workforce Councils. Those councils are now considered action councils because they make decisions about regionally based funding expenditures.
• The Arkansas Economic Development Commission charts the course for workforce needs and informs the governor’s cabinet. The state also has regional economic development entities such as the Metro Little Rock Alliance and Crossroads Coalition in eastern Arkansas.

• In Georgia, each of the individual technical colleges partner with local business and industry. For example, when automaker Kia made the decision to build a new plant in Columbus, the local technical colleges partnered with Kia to establish training labs to ensure that students could move from the colleges to the factory successfully.

• Louisiana leveraged state resources and regional partnerships to build teaching facilities for technical programs to serve high-demand jobs. For example, the state recently began construction on an allied health building, a STEM building and a new process-technology building.

• Maryland has used its federal recovery funds on regional initiatives to address key employment sectors related to middle-skill jobs — targeting four sectors: manufacturing, cyber, construction and health care.

• South Carolina is working with its regional partners through its technical colleges, readySC and Apprenticeship Carolina to meet the needs of local businesses and industry.

• Virginia is using incentive funds for regional Career Pathway grants that target industry sectors to bring stakeholders together to focus on middle-skill jobs.

• The master plan of the West Virginia Community and Technical College System requires each institution to meet with regional business and industry leaders to addresses their workforce needs.

8 and 14. Which sectors of education (if any) has the state assigned to take on a primary role in preparing graduates for middle-skill jobs? Which system(s) in your state offer career and technical education?

While all states acknowledge the interdependence of their education agencies, most SREB states agree that the agency with the primary responsibility for preparing state residents for middle-skill jobs is the two-year college sector.

➢ Five states coordinate through community/technical two-year colleges.
  • In Arkansas, the two-year colleges coordinate the work. Through the Department of Career Education, Arkansas has secondary career centers for high school students. Some four-year colleges offer associate technical degrees. Arkansas has a higher education coordinating board that approves new programs.
  • In Louisiana, the LCTCS is the primary provider of career and technical education in Louisiana. To a lesser degree, K-12 also provides career and technical education.
  • In Mississippi, the state’s community colleges are the primary provider for career and technical education.
  • In North Carolina, coordination is primarily a function of the community college system.
  • South Carolina has designated the Technical College System to coordinate workforce education, but these 16 technical colleges also work with the readySC division and Apprenticeship Carolina to prepare students for middle-skill jobs. This role includes engaging with industry leaders to ensure that the curriculum matches the changing need in these STEM fields.

➢ In other states, coordination is joint or shared between K-12 career-technical education and the community/technical two-year colleges.
  • Alabama offers career and technical education programming both in the K-12 and higher education systems. The state has comprehensive high schools in its 134 schools systems, as well as 55 stand-
alone career and technology centers. Likewise, every higher education institution that is either a community or a technical college has a program devoted to career and technical education. Federal Perkins funding for career-technical programs comes through the K-12 system, but it often is subcontracted to the higher education institutions to provide career-technical services to all students.

- **In Kentucky**, career and technical education is coordinated within the Kentucky Department of Education and the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. With federal Perkins funding, the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board plays a role in workforce development.

- **In Maryland**, both secondary education and community colleges are strong. Every community college in Maryland offers career-technical education. The public schools all have career-technical education. Career and technical education is aligned from the secondary to the postsecondary level. The agencies have developed a tight partnership with all of the workforce agencies: the University System of Maryland, various Maryland business and economic development groups, the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation — all work closely together. The partnership is strong enough to handle statewide offerings as well as the local niche programs.

- **In Oklahoma**, this role is filled by a partnership between the Oklahoma career and technical system from the high schools and the community college system.

- **In Virginia**, workforce development education is coordinated by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Adult Education and the Virginia Community and Technical College System, but the regional higher education centers and the universities increasingly have been involved. The major federal funding for career and technical education — Perkins funding — is administered by the Virginia Department of Education. The Virginia Department of Occupation Education is responsible for career and technical education statewide. Virginia’s postsecondary institutions get a relatively low percentage of funding from VDOE (about 15 percent of funding goes to postsecondary), so it is primarily funding programs for school division career and technical education programs.

9. **Does your state have policies that require the use of work-site learning for middle-skill jobs and/or general work orientation?**

- **All the states noted that postsecondary work site learning was program-specific.**
  - **Alabama** has been interested in the “learn and earn” concept, and so it recently added apprenticeship and co-op programs to help students build their resumes and get job skills while they are in school.
  - **In Arkansas**, the two-year colleges work with business and industry to provide training at the college or in the plant, based on the program and business needs.
  - **In Georgia**, work site learning is program- and industry-specific in areas such as automotive technology or early childhood care.
  - **Kentucky** is accelerating opportunities to “learn and earn,” so its newest career pathways include work-based components. Adult Education, KCTCS and Workforce Development are working on an adult-learner framework that will incorporate this concept, but it is not completed.
  - **In Louisiana**, work site learning is program-specific. Louisiana generally has requirements for work site education related to clinical experience requirements for health care training.
  - **Maryland** has policies and procedures for career and technology education programs at the high school level that require work based learning as a component.
  - **In Oklahoma**, some programs within the institutions require an internship. The Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology requires every student to have an internship, mainly applied to two-year degrees in the sciences.
• In **South Carolina**, readySC has a work component. In the apprenticeship program and the Technical Scholars Programs, the internships and co-ops all have work components.

• In **Tennessee**, work site learning is connected to specific programs such as allied health fields. The state is developing internships for all of its programs — at both the high school and college levels.

• In **Virginia**, work site learning requirements are program-specific.

• **West Virginia** does not require work-based learning, but the West Virginia Earn and Learn program is causing the state to consider the idea.

10. *What, if anything, has your state done to assess whether or not your higher education campuses are meeting the unique needs of adult learners or resumed undergraduates?*

All states have programs for addressing the needs of these adult learners, including programs for adult students learning basic literacy skills, those seeking secondary credentials such as the GED, and special populations.

➢ Programs and services for veterans

• **Alabama** has entered into an agreement with the National Guard to engage veterans, spouses and family members in education or re-training. The state provides scholarships for these students if they are unable to pay through other sources. The institutions provide prior learning assessments based on the National Guard Training documents so that training courses can be the basis for prior learning credit. The state provides reverse transfers for students who had some college before they entered the military to ensure those who were nearly finished and might now qualify for degrees can earn them. The institutions complete the process for the potential graduates and send them the diplomas or reach out to them to return for a few final courses, perhaps online. “Completion-to-employment” is the focus: While the state is committed to college completion, it also wants to go to the next step — employment.

• **Georgia** considers its institutions supportive of veterans. Prior learning assessments are available, and military veterans are making good use of them. The University System of Georgia and the Technical College System are jointly building a veterans center in middle Georgia specifically to help returning veterans acclimate, enroll in education programs, and get the help they need before returning to the workforce.

• **West Virginia** grants college credit for veteran’s military experience based on analyses from the American Council of Education, and it may grant additional credit through a transcript review process. In addition, some community and technical colleges have implemented the Future Soldier Program, which enrolls individuals in college-level courses between enlistment and reporting for active duty.

➢ Programs and services for adults

• **Alabama** has a Career Center System for dislocated workers. Rapid response teams go into communities where companies have laid off workers to urge them to get into training programs.

• In **Georgia**, the Technical College System is the state provider of adult education for residents without high school diplomas or a GED credential. Students without this credential can be placed into postsecondary technical programs as they complete it.

• **Louisiana** has made concerted efforts for several years to get adults to return to college. Through the CALL program, Louisiana brings students back to campus to complete degrees. In Louisiana, under-educated adult students can attend LCTCS’s WorkReady U to earn industry-based
certifications while studying to pass the GED test. It helps adults develop the skills they need to compete for family-sustainable employment while continuing their education.

- The Mississippi Legislature created the Education Achievement Council in 2010 with the goal “to work toward increasing the education attainment and skill levels of the state’s working-age population benchmark to the national average by 2025.” The group is composed of various leaders from across the state from both the public and private sectors. Some of the issues the council has addressed include creating a performance profile for each public community college and university, showing student enrollment growth, degrees awarded, student success, workforce development, remediation of students entering higher education in the state and financial aid issues that are critical to our students.

- Maryland institutions are engaged in reverse transfer.

- Oklahoma’s postsecondary institutions provide incentives for students with some college but no degree to return to college for a bachelor’s degree. The program is called Reach Higher.

- South Carolina’s readySC encourages students with some college but no degree to complete college. Apprenticeship Carolina helps students add skill sets for jobs.

- West Virginia offers a Board of Governors Associate of Applied Science degree that incorporates prior learning and experiential learning for college credit. Baccalaureate institutions have a companion program called the Regents Bachelor’s of Art, which allows for transfer from the Board of Governors AAS degree program.

- Programs and services for resumed undergraduates

  - Arkansas has institutionally based efforts to attract students back to college who have some college but no degrees. Some campuses are using TV advertisements to encourage residents who started programs to return for completion, even if they started elsewhere.

  - In Virginia, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia commissioned a study of degree attainment of adult students, focusing on both associate and baccalaureate degrees. Also, Virginia has provided rapid response funding from the Workforce Investment Act to provide short-term training — both credit and non-credit — for dislocated workers. Virginia also provides help for 18- to 28-year-olds without high school diplomas, through a program called PluggedIN, which helps them get a high school credential as they receive training. Virginia has developed other programs to help specific populations: adults moving into teaching positions through Educate VA, dislocated workers training for new jobs, and pregnant and parenting students needing expanded student support services.

  - West Virginia has initiated a program called Degree Now that encourages students with some college and no degree to complete the requirements for an associate or baccalaureate degree.

II and I2. Does your state offer online learning opportunities to students pursuing two-year degrees and certificates? Does your state offer any associate degrees or certificates that can be earned completely online? If yes, in which areas?

All SREB states offer online courses to students pursuing two-year degrees or certificates. In general, online course work for two-year programs is general education, and it is supplemental to shop- or lab-based course work in a hybrid learning model. (Hybrid models involve both online and traditional instructional methods). Some SREB states offer some certificates or associate degrees that can be earned entirely online. These credentials vary in the types of careers to which they typically lead.
Some SREB states offer complete online two-year degree programs.

- **Georgia** offers online courses through the Georgia Virtual Technical Connection. Availability of these courses varies by institution in the Technical College System of Georgia. The state offers several degrees that may be earned entirely online, including a logistics degree. However, most technical degrees in the state with an online component must be completed through a hybrid model.

- The **Kentucky** Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) offers online courses two ways: a module-based system that students can customize to fit their schedule and academic objective (skill acquisition, retraining, or credential completion) or a more traditional term system culminating in an associate degree or other credential. Courses taken online through KCTCS are transferrable to four-year institutions. Through the online learning program, KCTCS offers several associate degrees and credentials that may be earned entirely online.

- In **Mississippi**, online degree and certificate programs are offered at the specific colleges: Coahoma Community College offers medical assistant, medical billing and coding, and office systems online; East Mississippi Community College offers business and marketing management technology and office systems technology online; Hinds Community College and Holmes Community College offer business office technology and paralegal online; Itawamba Community College offers gerontology, business office technology, criminal justice and paralegal; and, Meridian Community College offers health information technology online.

- In **Tennessee**, students can take courses or earn degrees and certificates entirely online through the Regents Online Degree Program or through hybrid learning.

- The **Texas** Community College system has more than 180 certificates and 50 degrees that can be earned completely online.

- In **Virginia**, a consortium of community colleges shares online courses. The state offers nearly 80 degrees that can be earned entirely online.

Some states raised particular issues or limitations related to online courses and programs.

- In **Arkansas**, the limited availability of high-speed Internet bandwidth has been a sizeable hurdle for two-year and technical colleges making courses available online. The state recently received a grant that will increase the bandwidth capacity of two-year institutions. These colleges anticipate expanding online courses significantly once the Internet expansion is complete. Arkansas offers only one associate degree entirely online — in general studies.

- Several community colleges in **Louisiana** offer online courses and programs. LCTCS Online was created in 2009 to increase access to education for more students. The online offerings include general education courses, certain course required in high demand programs and degrees and certificate programs. Programs include criminal justice and computer information systems. Louisiana does not offer degrees online; however, for most technical degrees, it offers the general education courses online.

- In **North Carolina**, each community college determines the particular type of online courses that are offered; they vary in scope and length.

- Students in **West Virginia** have access to some online courses and degree programs. However, technical or trade degree programs are not available online.
13. Does your state follow two-year degree and certificate holders into the workforce?

- **Most states do have a provision for tracking students once they leave a two-year program.**
  - **Alabama** partners with the U.S. Department of Labor to track two-year degree and certificate holders into the workforce by cross-referencing the state’s higher education data with the federal employment database. Because it is using federal data, Alabama is able to track graduates of its higher education institutions across state lines, although Alabama is not currently engaged in any cooperative data-sharing with other states.
  - **Arkansas**, the independent Arkansas Research Center (ARC) gathers and analyzes data from multiple state and federal government agencies. ARC can then draw conclusions about the relationship between education attainment, employability, wages and specific careers. It can also identify and track adults who leave the workforce and return to college for retraining, and it can demonstrate the value added by this additional academic training. Furthermore, Arkansas participates in data-sharing agreements with neighboring states, enabling them to track individuals across state lines and understand what motivates their moving out of state.
  - **Georgia** uses enrollment and graduation data, combined with unemployment and salary data from the U.S. Department of Labor, to track students into the workforce. This aggregate data enables the state to track students across state lines into other states’ workforces or into military service. The data analysis is sensitive enough to tell the state which institution of higher education such students attended and what industries they entered.
  - **Kentucky’s** Center for Education and Workforce Statistics is a joint effort of the Department of Education, the Council on Postsecondary Education, the Education Professional Standards Board, and the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. Together, these agencies created a system that securely links data from early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, teacher licensure and preparation, and other sources to allow the state to gain a broader understanding of the educational process as a seamless system. The center uses unemployment data as well as data from other state and federal agencies to analyze the movement of residents between education and the workforce. Kentucky is beginning to develop a system for tracking individuals across state lines, as well as sharing data with other states.
  - **Louisiana** has a data exchange agreement with the state Workforce Commission that enables access to unemployment and wage data. The state uses this data to help with program evaluation at two-year and technical colleges in the state. Louisiana is not able to track its residents outside of the state, nor does it share data with other states.
  - In **Maryland**, data sharing partnerships exist between various agencies, including the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation and the U.S. Department of Defense.
  - In **Mississippi**, the state tracks individuals into the workforce using various data elements that include: entered employment, employment retention, average earnings, earnings gains, business penetration, and hiring activities.
  - **Oklahoma** has an agreement with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission to share data. It matches employment data so it can determine the percentage of people that are employed in Oklahoma by industry. For those who are not matched, the state shares data with the Oklahoma Tax Commission to determine who is still in the state for other reasons, like education. The data show, for example, that 90 percent of graduates stayed in the state.
  - **South Carolina** tracks students into the workforce and shares data with other states.
  - The **Tennessee** Higher Education Commission tracks students into the workforce. It does not share state-level data with other states at this time.
• In **Texas**, the state’s longitudinal data system follows secondary students into postsecondary education or the workforce. It also follows postsecondary students into the workforce.

• The **Virginia** Longitudinal Data System, a division of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, has been used nationally as a model for state data systems for the depth of its analysis.

• **West Virginia** tracks students through its state employment office.

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