

# School-to-Work Impact in Georgia Schools

## Why School to Work?

### Findings from the Georgia School-To-Work Project

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This is the first in a series of project briefs providing information and findings from a two-year study of the implementation and impact of School-to-Work (STW) in Georgia. The purpose of this brief is to provide a context for STW in Georgia by reviewing the federal School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994. The background of the Act, its purposes and design, and a synthesis of findings of its impact nationally will be briefly discussed. Subsequent briefs focus on the Georgia STW project, specifically its implementation and impact on career awareness in elementary and middle schools, career development in high schools, employer involvement in education, progress in creating comprehensive youth development systems, student achievement, school improvement, and others.

#### Overview

The federal School to Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) was enacted as Public Law 103-239 on May 4, 1994 to create coherent systems that link *school-based learning* characterized by career awareness and exploration, high academic standards, and career majors to *work-based learning* including planned programs of work experience, workplace mentoring, and programs of study that lead to industry recognized credentials. These two types of learning were to be linked through *connecting activities* such as drawing on trained professionals at school and work sites to counsel and work with students and employers, assisting with job placement, and linking students with other community services and continuing education. Activities were to begin no later than the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, continue through high school, and culminate in postsecondary training or education and, ultimately, in productive employment.

STWOA was funded with \$1.8 billion in federal investments. It was a “sunset” Act in that funds were appropriated beginning in 1994, rolled out to the 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico

over a period of 7 years, and then ended. The Act was not renewed. STWOA was administered jointly by the federal Departments of Education and Labor with the national office headquartered in Washington, DC until its closure in 2001. Georgia was one of the last states to receive STWOA federal funding. It received about \$38 million in 1998, which was to be distributed over a five-year period. Federal STWOA funds awarded to Georgia were essentially spent by the end of Fiscal Year 2004 with some carry-over in funding to further implement initiatives through 2005.

#### Why STWOA?

The School to Work Opportunities Act set an ambitious agenda for changing schools and the way instruction was to be delivered for millions of American youth. It was a response to several national issues: how American schools prepare students for careers, the role of American industry in a competitive global economy, generally poor performance of American students on international skills measures—particularly those in math and science, and employers’ disappointment with young labor-force entrants.

In a series of papers and statements, Congress commented that unemployment among youths in the U.S. was “intolerably high,” that many youth do not possess the academic and entry-level occupational skills necessary to succeed in the changing economy, far too many youngsters do not complete high school, and real wages of young adults without college degrees were continuing to decline. On the business or industry side, Congress noted the tremendous changes in workplaces with the increasing demand for technology and technical skills, multi-tasking, critical thinking, higher occupational skills standards, team work, and workers with sufficient education to enable them to change jobs and skills several times over their work life. In addressing the gap between the schools and the education needed for 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplaces, Congress noted that “the United States lacks a comprehensive and coherent system to help its youths

acquire the knowledge, skills, abilities, and information about and access to the labor market necessary to make an effective transition from school to career-oriented work or to further education and training.”

**Purpose of STWOA**

The stated purpose of the School to Work Opportunities Act was to establish a national framework within which all states can create statewide STW systems. Funds were to be used as “seed money” or “venture capital” to underwrite the costs of initial planning and establishing systems that would be sustained through other resources. Throughout the Act, Congress stated its intentions for use of funds by providing examples of systems and activities that might be initiated within the states or through partnerships within the states. Several such descriptions or examples that might be implemented are highlighted in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1. Examples of STW Systems Presented in STWOA of 1994**

- Performance-based education and training that will enable students to earn portable credentials; prepare them for first-jobs in high skill, high wage careers; and increase their opportunities for further education, including a 4-year college or university
- System that enables youths to identify and navigate paths to productive and progressively more rewarding roles in the workplace
- System that helps all students attain high academic and occupational standards
- Linkages between secondary and postsecondary education
- System to facilitate the transfer of students between education and training programs
- Partnerships that are dedicated to linking the worlds of school and work
- Employers as joint partners with educators in providing opportunities for all students to participate in high quality work-based learning programs

The last grant funds from the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act were awarded to the states in 1998. The Office was closed in 2001, although some federal oversight still remains in monitoring state use of the funds.

**Table 2. Examples of STW Activities Depicted in STWOA of 1994**

- Build on and advance a range of promising school-to-work activities such as tech prep, career academies, youth apprenticeship, school-sponsored enterprises, business-education compacts, and promising strategies that assist school dropouts
- Integrate academic and occupational learning and school-based and work-based learning
- Provide instruction in general workplace competencies
- Provide students with career majors
- Provide enriched learning experiences and assistance in obtaining good jobs and continuing education
- Expose students to a broad array of career opportunities and facilitate the selection of career majors, based on individual interests, goals, strengths, and abilities
- Implement programs that will require paid high quality work-based learning experiences, including introduction to all aspects of the industry
- Implement career awareness, exploration, and counseling to help students identify their interests, goals, and career majors, including those options that may not be traditional for their gender, race, or ethnicity

**Findings from National Studies**

The most comprehensive analysis of studies on School-to-Work was published by the Institute on Education and Economy at Columbia University in 2001.<sup>1</sup> The authors reviewed over 100 studies on school-to-work initiatives at the national, state, and district levels in response to two essential questions: *In what ways has the strategy shown potential to improve schools, educational outcomes, and the country’s system for preparing young people for college and careers? Which aspects have been most successful and why?* The following are conclusions with highlighted examples from this report.

**School-to-work supports academic achievement.**

<sup>1</sup> *School-to-Work: Making a Difference in Education: A Research Report to America* by K. L. Hughes, T. R. Bailey, & M. J. Mechur. New York: Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2001 [www.tc.columbia.edu/iee].

- Students in school-to-work initiatives earn GPAs that are at least as high as comparable students, if not higher.
- Students in school-to-work initiatives have better attendance than comparable students.
- School-to-work students are less likely to drop out of school. This is especially true for those who are considered at “high risk” of not graduating.
- School-to-work students are just as likely, or are more likely, to attend college as comparable students.
- Impact on students’ scores on standardized tests indicates little if any effect from participation in school-to-work activities

***School-to-work supports career preparation.***

- School-to-work activities help students to define their career interests and goals for the future and teach students job-readiness and soft skills.
- The jobs that students obtain through school-to-work tend to be different from and of higher quality than the jobs young people tend to have.
- Students who acquire their jobs through school-to-work are likely to learn skills that employers value, and employers believe that school-to-work students perform well on the job.
- School-to-work participation is associated with positive post-high school labor market outcomes such as lower unemployment and higher wages.

***School-to-work supports youth development.***

- School-to-work helps students plan for the future and act in ways that will help them achieve their goals.
- Students are more confident about themselves when they learn new skills in their school-to-work activities.
- Students report that school-to-work activities make them more interested in school and help them understand why school is important.
- School-to-work can provide students with a network of supportive adults, who can positively influence students’ educational achievement and help students make decisions about college and careers.

***Teachers support school-to-work.***

- Teachers believe that school-to-work is good for students and helps them achieve at high levels.

- Teachers report that they benefit from participating in work-based professional development.
- Teachers state that participating in school-to-work keeps them motivated to teach.

***Employers are enthusiastic about their involvement with school-to-work.***

- Vast majorities of surveyed employers support the school-to-work vision and its many initiatives, and employers speak well of their student interns.
- Employer participation in school-to-work partnerships and in work-based learning activities is widespread.
- Employers see real benefits to their firms from participation, such as reduced recruitment and training costs, and better experiences in hiring local graduates.

In summary, the analysis of nearly 100 studies throughout the country supported the benefit of school-to-work initiatives on students, employers, and communities. It has been deemed as a very effective means of bringing youth and adults together. Those who have seriously studied its implementation believe it to be integral to high school reform and youth development systems building.

**References**

Hughes, K.L., Bailey, T.R., & Mechur, M.J. (2001). *Making a difference in education: A research report to America*. New York: Institute on Education and the Economy. Teachers College, Columbia University.

School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, Volume 20 (1994).

**Further Information**

This research brief has been prepared by the Occupational Research Group at the University of Georgia under contract with the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, Office of School-to-Work. Principal Investigator on the STW evaluation and assessment project at UGA is Richard L. Lynch. Dorothy Harnish is Projects Manager, Grace Thornton and Jana Thompson are project specialists, Penny Rabon is administrative assistant, and Anita Turlington has assisted with some data collection and technical writing. Principal consultants have included Gail Fletcher and Ann Peisher. Complete reports emanating from two years of assessment of STW in Georgia are available on [www.coe.uga.edu/ORG](http://www.coe.uga.edu/ORG). Data and information were obtained from 41 local School-to-Work Partnerships operating across Georgia. Further information about STW in Georgia may be obtained at [www.dtae.org/gastw](http://www.dtae.org/gastw)

## Georgia School to Work Partnerships

	<u>Contact Telephone Number*</u>
Altamaha Consortium for Education	912-588-2581
Atlanta REAL School to Work	404-880-6015
Career Action Network of Central Georgia	478-757-3411
Career Transition and Work Retention Partnership	404-297-9522
Carpet Capital Consortium	706-272-4435
Central Georgia Tech Prep School to Work Partnership	478-277-9802
Coastal Georgia School to Work Partnership	912-264-7383
Coastal Georgia Workforce Development Partnership	912-644-6440
Coosa Valley Tech Prep/School to Work Partnership	706-802-5817
CSRA School to Work Partnership	706-771-4114
East Central Area Tech Educational Transitional Consortium	229-468-2089
Education to Careers at South Georgia Technical College	229-931-5161
Flint River School to Work Partnership	706-646-6122
Greater Chattahoochee Education to Career Consortium	706-649-1922
Griffin Area Consortium	770-228-7363
Kennesaw Regional Business and Education Collaborative	770-423-6492
Middle Georgia BRIDGE Partnership	478-988-6883
Northeast Corridor Youth Partnership	770-513-6704
Northeast Georgia Corner Connection School to Work Consortium	706-754-7867
Northeast Georgia Workforce Development Partnership	706-369-5703
Northeast Georgia Youth Opportunities Council	706-367-8939
Northwest Georgia Education to Careers Partnership	706-764-3735
Northwest Georgia Metro School to Work Consortium	770-529-2305
Northwest Georgia School to Work Partnership	706-253-4550
Okefenokee Educational School to Work Partnership	912-284-2510
Sandersville Regional Education to Career	478-553-2054
School to Work Atlanta Region South	--
South Partnership/Cobb, Marietta City, and Paulding Education Consortium	770-528-4466
Southeastern School to Work Consortium	912-538-3130
Southern Crescent Education Initiative	770-960-2093
Southwest Georgia Educational Transition Consortium	229-430-1972
Sunbelt School to Work Alliance	229-891-7000
Swainsboro Area School to Work Partnership	478-289-2319
Technical Career Academy of Northeast Georgia	706-369-5871
Thomas Area School to Work Partnership	229-225-3928
Three Rivers School to Work Partnership	229-248-2530
Tri-County Workforce Consortium	912-489-8751
Valdosta Area School to Work Partnership	229-249-2666
West Georgia School to Work Collaborative	706-837-4206 Ext. 5757
Winder Barrow Coalition for Adult and Continuing Education	770-307-1190
Workforce Alliance - The Next Generation	770-537-5367

\* Contact numbers provided by the GA STW Office and were current as of June 1, 2004