

School-to-Work Impact in Georgia Schools Career Development in High Schools

Findings from the Georgia School-To-Work Project

Occupational Research Group
College of Education, the University of Georgia

Brief No. 3, Summer 2004

This is one in a series of briefs addressing the statewide findings of a two-year study of the implementation and impact of School-to-Work in Georgia. Beginning with an overview of the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act and best practices in career awareness and development, this brief describes Georgia's School-to-Work (STW) initiatives and some details about what local STW Partnerships are doing to increase career awareness and development among employers, teachers, parents, and high school students.

Overview of School-to-Work

The federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act was enacted in 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 are to begin not later than 7th grade, continue through high school, and culminate in postsecondary training or education and, ultimately, in productive employment. However, beyond these initial specifications, the Act gave a great deal of flexibility to the states and to the localities about how to actually implement, govern, program, and assess the impact of such system(s). The Act did specifically mention that the school-based learning component include career exploration, counseling, and development.

Results of National Studies

Overall, research findings have been positive about the effect of School-to-Work on student career preparation. A comprehensive review of research at the national, state, and district levels indicates that School-to-Work activities that involve partnerships between business and education do make a difference for students. Such activities support academic achievement by reducing the dropout rate and increasing college enrollment. Through School-to-Work participation, students develop work-related skills and begin to consider careers and plan for the future. Additionally, research shows that students' career options are broadened to include college and other post-secondary choices. The implication is that School-to-Work helps students mature. It increases contact between students and adults, including teachers and workplace mentors. Studies indicate that both teachers and employers have positive attitudes about School-to-Work.

Best practices in the area of career awareness that have been noted in national research findings are listed in the following box.

Career Awareness Best Practices

- Integrated curriculum
- Mentoring
- Service learning
- Contextualized learning
- Career exploration
- Community-based learning
- Employers as teachers
- One-time events such as career days and field trips to work sites
- Work experience programs

High Schools and Students

At the high school level, students may have opportunities to participate in a variety of school-based and work-based learning activities. Some examples of *school-based* activities include classes in which references to the world of work are an integral part of the curriculum, aligning career preparation and academic curricula, and organizing all instruction around major career themes.

Work-based learning provides students with a variety of opportunities to observe and participate in career and employment preparation. Such learning allows students to learn through actual work experiences, either in the school or, more commonly, at a business establishment. Learning at the workplace is intended to connect to the students' academic and career/ technical coursework in school. Examples of such activities are job-shadowing, mentoring, internships, cooperative education, and youth apprenticeships.

At the high school level, best practices in career development tend to fall into four categories:

1. **Introductory**—Activities or programs that arouse students' interest in their own personal and professional growth. They tend to be school-based, of short duration (2 weeks or less), led by an adult, and include hands-on group activities. Examples are career days/fairs, field trips, aptitude assessments, and academic career planning.
2. **Advising**—Activities or programs are usually school-based individual activities led by adults and can be long or short term in length. Some examples include academic and career counseling, career-focused parent/student conferences, career libraries/resource centers, career clusters/ pathways/ majors, portfolios of career information, individual career plans, and career interest assessments.
3. **Curriculum-Based**—Activities usually promote core student knowledge and skills through content relevant to the world of work. These activities

usually are comprised of active instruction and are primarily group activities conducted in a school setting, lasting more than two weeks. Examples are career information or career skills infused into the curriculum, school-based enterprises, Tech Prep, and student career clubs.

4. **Work-Based**—Activities or programs that promote student knowledge and motivation through sustained and meaningful interactions with work sites in the community. Examples include cooperative education, internships, job shadowing, mentoring, service learning, and youth apprenticeships.

Professional Development

Effective practices in School-to-Work (STW) sites across the nation emphasize the importance of professional development for teachers. STW transition environments are much more complex than traditional educational settings and require a new approach to integrate school-based learning and work-based learning. Therefore, educators in general and teachers in particular must be provided with opportunities to gain STW-related knowledge, instructional expertise, and the associated attitudes needed to collaborate in effective ways with employers and the community. For professional development to have a meaningful impact on teachers and their students, it must be both comprehensive and long term. It must also prepare both career/technical and academic teachers for their involvement in school-to-work transitions.

The Georgia School-to-Work Initiative

In Georgia, interagency planners developed a three-fold vision for School-to-Work:

1. fill gaps and strengthen, expand, and connect the many successful school and community initiatives already in place;
2. enable local partnerships to develop strategies that meet their unique needs and are appropriate in local contexts; and
3. establish an interagency support infra-structure to connect schools, students, families, employers, and other community partners with existing work-related initiatives, programs, and information about successful practice.

As the 41 local School-to-work Partnerships across Georgia began to plan programs and activities around locally-identified needs, four broad areas of focus for School-to-Work emerged statewide:

1. increase career awareness,
2. expand employer involvement in education,
3. strengthen student achievement, and
4. build systems that are supportive of youth and economic development.

Participation in Career Development

Of the 373 high schools in Georgia, 347 (93 percent) participated at some level in School-to-Work. High schools offered opportunities for advanced and significant career preparation activities, such as job shadowing, internships, registered and youth apprenticeships, cooperative education, school-based enterprises, and service learning activities. The number of schools participating in these types of work-based activities increased across the board in 2002-2003—in some cases, dramatically. For instance, the number of schools offering registered apprenticeships nearly doubled from 56 in Year One to 110 in Year Two. And the number of schools providing school-based enterprises increased from 84 in the

first year of School-to-Work implementation to 138 in the second year. See Figure 1 for school participation in work-based learning activities.

Figure 1. Georgia High School Participation in Student Work-Based Learning Activities

	Year 1	Year 2
Work-based Job-shadowing	226	229
Work-based Mentoring	165	186
Internships	152	185
Youth/Pre-apprenticeships	232	293
Registered Apprenticeships	56	110
Cooperative Education	176	206
School-based Enterprises	84	138
Comm Serv/Serv Learning	174	210

N= 373 high schools in Georgia in 2002-2003

In the cases of work-based mentoring and internships, the number of participating students more than doubled. Yet, even so, overall student participation is very low when the total number of students in all high schools participating in school-to-work activities (367,415) is compared with the largest number of students participating in a work-based learning activity (i.e., 26,177 students in service learning activities). At best, 10 percent of Georgia’s high school student population is engaged in any activity typically identified with work-based learning. It is of little comfort to know that these participation levels are comparable to those at the national level. The fact is that a large number of high school graduates still do not plan to pursue immediately any type of further education—rather they intend to enter the workforce upon high school graduation. Most have very little idea of what to expect or how to prepare for this transition. See Figure 2 for student participation at high schools in Georgia.

Figure 2. Georgia High School Student Participation in Student Work-Based Learning Activities

	Year 1	Year 2
Work-based Job-shadowing	6,682	9,348
Work-based Mentoring	1,701	4,698
Internships	1,402	3,596
Youth/Pre-apprenticeships	2,050	3,028
Registered Apprenticeships	604	972
Cooperative Education	5,838	8,289
School-based Enterprises	2,493	4,209
Comm Serv/Serv Learning	23,636	26,177

N = 367,415 students in schools participating with Georgia School-to-Work

Each of Georgia's 41 School-to-Work Partnerships was asked to describe its most successful career awareness strategies, best practices, or activities. Although each Partnership developed strategies to meet the specific needs of the communities in its service area, nine specific strategies emerged as being most successful in promoting career awareness.

Georgia's Strategies to Promote Career Awareness

1. Providing career materials
2. Providing educators professional development
3. Expanding career planning activities
4. Providing short-term, one-time events
5. Offering technical college orientation and tours
6. Using career interest inventories
7. Integrating real-world examples into instruction
8. Developing written student career plans
9. Participating in school improvement planning

A majority of the Partnerships report participation in all nine strategies. Most of the successful strategies named by the Partnerships as promoting career awareness are also named in the research literature in this topic area.

Career Materials

School-to-Work Partnerships feel that one of their most successful strategies has been to provide career materials to schools. They distributed software, books, magazines, posters, video, and other resources to the schools to help them build school career centers.

Partnerships consider the Bridges.com program to be a great resource for students to access via computer. It is also an invaluable resource for teachers and parents. Teachers are able to use the students' interests as a focus in the curriculum, and parents have the option of investigating the many opportunities available for their children, as well as for themselves.

Professional Development

Making Georgia educators aware of career opportunities is particularly successful when it involves employer participation or concentrates on career education topics. Through Summer Educator Academies, educators from high schools and postsecondary institutions collaborate with business and industry leaders, local board of education members, and other educators on school-to-work goals. Another effective practice of the School-to-Work Initiative is Educators in Industry, which connects educators to the workplace. Through this program educators can:

- participate in worksite visits or tours,
- be paired with an employee in a work setting for some or all of one day (job shadowing),
- complete an extended internship or externship in a workplace actually working on tasks or projects for the host industry, and/or
- conduct individual field interviews with industry employees or managers about career related topics.

Targeted lesson plans that include projects and real-world activities are then usually produced to enrich the curriculum.

Career Planning Activities

CHOICES and other career planning programs also have been highly effective. The Partnerships are using specific programs and activities to increase career awareness and development by placing business leaders in the schools to interact with educators and students, talk with students about careers, participate in the Work Keys assessment program, and use the Key Train software to prepare students in key workplace skills.

Technical College Orientation and Tours

Partnerships have increasingly turned to technical college tours and orientations to promote career awareness. This strategy is used to target specific audiences, such as middle/junior high school students or high school juniors or seniors, guidance counselors, administrators, and other related high school staff to expose them to programs, careers and resources that are available at the technical colleges. Some Partnerships have also targeted parents for these tours to broaden their perspective about the range of careers that are available.

Real-World Examples; One-Time, Short-Term Activities

Integrating real-world examples into instruction has proved to be a valuable strategy for the classroom. One-time, short-term activities such as career fairs and job-shadowing are also an effective way to promote career awareness. Partnerships say that they receive some of their most positive feedback from participants of short-term or one-time events.

Demonstration Grant Awards

Demonstration grants were awarded to 19 Partnerships to develop best practices in Georgia School-to-Work communities. Several of these demonstration projects had a strong career awareness/career development component:

- **Power Academy—Coosa Valley Area Consortium:** Created in partnership with Georgia Power and other area businesses to prepare high school students for positions within the power industry.
- **Model Aquaculture Program—NE Georgia Corner Connection:** Developed to provide education and training to high school and technical college students. Designed to establish a self-sustaining model aquaculture program in northeast Georgia.
- **COMPASS—Coastal Georgia Workforce Development Partnership and the Thomas Area Tech Prep and School to Work Partnership:** Designed to offer diagnostic feedback in core subjects, enabling high school students to define career choices based on their academic abilities.
- **Hospitality Academy—NE Georgia (NEGA) Workforce Development Partnership:** Founded academy for high school students; now establishing a post-secondary hospitality program at Athens Area Technical College.
- **Bridge 2--Middle Georgia BRIDGE School-to-Work Partnership:** Created in partnership with Middle Georgia Technical College to expand the College's Support Center; focuses on preparing high school students for postsecondary education and work.
- **Telecommunication & Technology for Economic Development—East Central Consortium:** Created in partnership with East Central Area Technical

College. Aligns high school curricula with the College's new telecommunication and technology program.

- *Career Pathways—Coastal Georgia School-to-Work Consortium*: Developed to provide opportunities for high school students to examine career and post secondary education options by comparing programs of study across several career clusters.

Learn more about these projects at the ORG website: <http://www.coe.uga.edu/ORG/research/demogrant.pdf>

Overcoming Barriers to Career Awareness Activities

The time constraints of full school schedules and coordinating activities with school personnel and business volunteers were among the greatest challenges to implementing career awareness activities. Misconceptions/negative perceptions about technical/career education and careers that require less than a four-year degree comprised another common barrier. These negative mindsets toward career/technical education were found among students, parents, educators, and business people. Additional challenges included a lack of involvement in education on the part of both business and parents and trying to work with counselors overloaded by demands. An emerging issue was a need in the growing international community for communication strategies to overcome language barriers, including additional language support and advisory support.

Most partnerships (81 percent) reported during Year Two that they were making progress in overcoming these barriers by using the following approaches.

Time constraints

- Persistence
- Flexible scheduling
- Coordination with other scheduled events

Negative mindset about technical/career education

- Providing opportunities for educators, business people, and parents to collaborate on school system priorities that focus on technical/career education
- Involving parents in program of study decisions
- Including parents in tours of local technical colleges
- Providing professional development for educators about technical/career education
- Having business community members make classroom presentations to students

Demands on counselors

- Supplementing counselors' efforts by providing opportunities for teachers to incorporate career awareness topics into the curriculum.
- Providing software resources such as ARTIFACTS to help with technical college identification

Lack of business involvement

- Actively participating in key business organizations such as chambers of commerce
- Holding short, objectives-based meetings with employers

Lack of parental involvement

- Tours of high schools, colleges, and technical colleges
- Invitations to career fairs
- Upgrading career/ technical programs
- Offering open houses
- Having 8th grade parents' nights
- Attending weekend parent workshops
- Scheduling meetings with parents and guardians

Sustainability

The over-arching goal of the Georgia School-to-Work initiative has been to achieve systemic and sustainable improvements in local education and workforce development. In just two years of full implementation, most local Partnerships have been able to leverage resources in their communities to ensure that many of the projects they have begun will be continued in the absence of federal School-to-Work funds. Many of the professional development activities, such as the Summer Educator Academy, Educators in Industry, teacher orientations, and contextual teaching workshops will be continued because School-to-Work Partnerships have helped them become part of schools' regular professional development offerings or because continued funding has been secured from other partners, such as the federal Tech Prep program, the Youth Apprenticeship program, or local schools/school systems. In some cases, funding and support for these professional development programs have been promised by employers or community agencies.

Programs related to career awareness and the provision of career information materials, School-to-Work and Tech Prep websites, career interest inventories, and the Georgia Career Information System will be continued by the schools, Tech Prep, or the Partnerships, themselves. Many of the CHOICES-type career planning programs also will be continued. Family Connection Partnerships, local Departments of Labor, and local business and industry are examples of entities that have made funding commitments or expressed support for continuing CHOICES-type programs.

Community collaboratives have seen the worth of job shadowing activities and have signed on as continuing partners. Career fairs and career days will be continued because they have become a vital part of high school and postsecondary education in many Georgia communities and they also provide a viable avenue for business participation. Involving business leaders in the school has given them new insight into the schools in addition to furnishing them with opportunities to provide more direct input into the educational process.

It appears that the seed money from the federal School-to-Work initiative has indeed given Georgia communities a boost in increasing career awareness and development among students, parents, educators, business people, and the community-at-large. Local School-to-Work Partnerships in their role as neutral intermediaries have been able to bring business, education, and other community groups to the table and encourage them to share vital resources for the overall betterment of their communities.

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. The content in this brief has been extracted from *Assessment of Progress in Georgia School-to-Work*, by Richard L. Lynch, Dorothy Harnish, Gail Fletcher, and Jana Thompson [www.coe.uga.edu/ORG], October, 2003. 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.

