



GEORGIA PARTNERSHIP  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

SECOND EDITION



*The "How To's" of*

# Community Planning

School  
Improvement

Accepting the  
Challenge

Commitment  
and Action

## The Economics of Education

### In 2004, the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education

embarked on a mission to spotlight the importance of education, especially its significance to the economic growth both individual communities and the entire state.

The Partnership, in cooperation with the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, developed "The Economics of Education" briefing and companion publication that clearly explains the inextricable link between education and prosperity for individuals as well as communities. The journey has taken this message to audiences throughout Georgia. **If communities are to flourish, they must ensure a well-educated workforce.**

## The Facts:

- Citizens who are poorly educated have reduced earning potential, increased unemployment, and limited opportunities.
- High school noncompleters, who are not ready for college or work, directly impact our communities. Local businesses need well educated, prepared workers.
- Poorly educated citizens result in less buying power, more social welfare costs, and higher crime rates.
- High school non-completers (25-year-olds and older) cost the state \$18 billion annually in lost revenue and approximately 200,000 jobs.\*
- If the loss of the state's output is added to this figure, the state's economy would be increased by \$24.5 billion annually.\*

\* Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development, "Updated Economic Impact of High School Non-Completion in Georgia: 2005 Estimate," Georgia Southern University, April 2007.

## How Is Your Community Doing?

### Do you know where to start to guarantee a first-class education for your children in your community?

It's time to find out, and then take steps to support and improve your local school system even if it already enjoys a good reputation.

### Facts to consider that are critical to growing, thriving communities:

- Are kindergartners ready to learn?
- Are third-graders reading on grade level?
- What is your high school graduation rate?
- Are your graduates ready for college and/or work?

Leaders in two Georgia communities, Elbert and Troup Counties, took "The Economics of Education" briefing to heart and took action. They have agreed to serve as case studies from which communities can learn and provide a strong bridge between quality education and economic vitality for communities.

The lessons shared start here, but the full story and how your community can get involved are available on the Partnership web site at [www.gpee.org](http://www.gpee.org). **First, read on...**

## How It Began:

**It was March, 2005, when 75 community leaders first met in Elbert County.** Troup County community leaders began a process of their own in the spring of 2006 with 100 stakeholders. These leaders represented groups including the local chamber of commerce, school system and board of education, hospital authority and various business and civic groups who heard "The Economics of Education" presentation and pledged to create a community action plan. These locally-driven plans provide the framework by which to ignite real change that is tied to children's learning. **The positive results will have lasting impact on the economic prosperity of these communities.**

- A community leader met with the Georgia Partnership staff and requested assistance in facilitating a process that would support the school system's improvement initiatives.
- Economics of Education Committees were established in both counties. The purpose was to design, implement, and evaluate a system in which the business community would work to support the school system's Improvement Plan.
- Leadership buy-in and continued support was critical to success, and key community leaders were aggressively recruited.
- A planning session, facilitated by the Partnership, began with members expressing why the effort was important to them. Heartfelt responses quickly separated this from "just another committee" to a program with very personal investments.



*"In Troup County, our primary goal was to change the culture to one in which education is valued and desired by everyone as a means to better oneself and in turn to better the community. We aren't there yet, but we feel that we now have the mechanisms in place to start changing the culture. We know it's a marathon and not a sprint. Community planning has helped bring about an awareness that educating our children is everyone's responsibility. We all have something to give and we all have everything to gain."*

- Renae Willis, Troup County Economics of Education Committee

## At These Sessions:

- 1. School leaders emphasized the system's support and appreciation of the committee's work.**

- 2. A thorough briefing on the system's School Improvement Plan was presented in both communities. Several goal areas were identified which included:**

- Student Learning
- Planning and Organization
- Leadership Capacity
- Rigorous Curriculum
- Best Practices in the Classroom
- Volunteers in the School
- Graduation Rate
- Parental Involvement
- Early Learning and School Readiness
- Closing Achievement Gaps
- Workforce Readiness
- Community Awareness

- 3. A brainstorming session resulted in several priorities:**

### **Elbert County:**

- Community Awareness of the Importance of Education
- Early Learning Environment
- Graduation Rate
- Parental Involvement
- Student Learning

### **Troup County:**

- Closing Achievement Gap
- Community Awareness
- Early Learning and School Readiness
- Graduation Rate
- Workforce Readiness

- 4. Committee divided into goal teams to address the priorities and then develop an action plan on how the community could support the School Improvement Plan.**

- 5. Each team developed:**

- Goal statements
  - Strategies
  - Timelines
  - Who's responsible
  - Evaluations
- An action plan was approved and announced to the community through the local media. It is available publicly through the various web sites of the school system, chamber of commerce, Elbert County Community Partnership and Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education.
  - Goal teams continue to work to implement the activities of the Action Plan. The Economics of Education Committee meets quarterly to monitor progress, analyze data and determine where changes are needed.



# What's Happened?



**Dedicated visionaries in both communities are making a difference. So can you. They have documented their work to provide a helpful template.**

## How are they making a difference?

### **Elbert County:**

- Ad Council Campaign
- New car contest for students who pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test
- Adopt-a-Class Program
- Articles in local chamber of commerce newsletter
- Early Learning Read at Home Initiative
- Choices Program - interactive workshops led by business and community leaders

*"The community leaders of Elbert and Troup Counties are quite visionary. They understand that community prosperity is dependent on an educated, skilled workforce. These leaders stepped into action, and they have made a positive impact on student achievement."*

*- Dr. Donna O'Neal, Program Facilitator,  
Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education*

### **Troup County:**

- Collaboration with agencies providing services to children
- Increasing Parents as Teachers Program
- Expanding summer professional programs for teachers
- Task force of human resource and school representatives to actively involve employees in schools during the work day
  - Employees time off
  - Centralizing the mentoring coalition with nonprofits
- Troup Transformation - faith-based adopt-a-school program
- Presentations to school staff on community involvement
- Public service announcements
- Career Connections in middle schools
- High school curriculum presented to business and industry leaders to address relevance and what's missing

## What's the Effect?

### **Elbert County:**

Leaders are using innovative ideas with numerous stakeholders in order to create change in their county. Community participation and *engagement* are significantly higher including joint meetings with key representatives from government, local business, and the school system to discuss plans and benchmarks for the initiative. A proposal also was submitted requesting that Elbert County be designated one of five counties to receive state assistance in accomplishing county goals. The proposal was approved, and Elbert County was named one of only five Accelerated Counties in Georgia. Because of the work of this Committee, Elbert County is uniquely qualified and already has a strong foundation in place to become a Certified Work-Ready Community.

### **Troup County:**

There are a variety of groups involved in providing programs and services for Troup County schools. There has been tremendous local support for the early learning portion of the plan, and there are several programs in place. The community plan also was referenced by the school system in curriculum decisions. Leaders are hopeful these partnerships will increase as more business and community members become engaged in the schools and invested in the outcomes for students.



*"The Elbert County Economics of Education Committee has provided a platform for action regarding how to best support our schools and help our students realize their greatest potential. Previously, there were no opportunities for different sectors to come together to discuss education or support the schools. In the past, it was too easy to have the mindset that the school system, businesses, county government, etc. have separate jobs. This process has given the sectors the opportunity to realize how the different sectors intersect and directly impact each other... Stakeholders knew with the support of the Georgia Partnership in the beginning that we didn't just want to sit around and talk – we wanted to act! We were very deliberate in the process of forming the committee, creating action steps, and working towards goals. This allowed us to make initial achievements and grow from there. Now we're talking about specific things to do, the real kids we are affecting, and what can we do to help make school improvement happen."*

- Laura Willis, Elbert County Economics of Education

Read On...

## Help is Just a "Click" Away!

A step-by-step replication manual is available on the Partnership web site at [www.gpee.org](http://www.gpee.org). Click on "Programs."

**The Georgia Partnership and these Economics of Education Committees** have "learned by doing" and want to make things as easy as possible for other communities who might want to develop their own school improvement program.

**Interested in Community Planning?** The Partnership's point of contact is Dr. Donna O'Neal. She facilitated the initial development of both the Elbert County and Troup County plans and is available at [doneal@mindspring.com](mailto:doneal@mindspring.com).

**If your community has developed a school system support plan**, we'd like to hear about it. Drop Donna O'Neal a note or call the Partnership at 404-223-2280.



*"Education leaders have the primary responsibility – but not the sole responsibility – to prepare our future workforce. The leaders in Troup and Elbert Counties realized that they had to mobilize all of the stakeholders in their communities to improve educational opportunities and outcomes. They realized that, fundamentally, strong education leads to strong economic development – education is economic development."*

- Dr. Steve Dolinger, President, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education



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