

## Introduction

Coweta County boasts historic downtowns of its own, but is also a place from which commuters increasingly travel to bustling Atlanta for jobs and entertainment. Only 30 miles southwest of the city's international airport, the employment, cultural and geographic advantages of Atlanta are easily accessible via the interstate. The school system's 20,000 plus students are studying in 29 schools, including three high schools, across the county, with a fast growth rate of between six and eight percent each year. There are some major employers and numerous small businesses. Like many other communities, it has national and global competition pressuring its employers to consider their options. Its citizens too have temptations to widen their horizons, wondering if other areas have better schools, higher wage jobs. Some young people have lost their motivation to stay in high school, consider postsecondary options, or prepare themselves for careers.

Does Coweta County, Georgia resemble your community? Does it have a similar combination of advantages and outside pressures? Are your employers, community members, and young people weighing their options in the wake of national and global changes? If so, then you may want to consider replicating the Central Educational Center (CEC), developed in Coweta County, as a response to these pressures.

CEC is a unique educational experience worth replicating in Georgia and nationally. It is a bold experiment—offering required academic courses and state-of-the-art technical and occupational courses to high-school students with the opportunity for dual-enrollment college credit while still in high school. Open to any high school student in the county, CEC is a career and technical center incorporating the region's technical college. There students also develop a work ethic, engage in work-based learning opportunities, and tackle real-life problems with adult students enrolled in the same technical college classes. A school experience like CEC gets students motivated to achieve and provides them the advice and credentials they need to enter fulfilling and rewarding careers. In fact, since the advent of CEC, county high schools have lower drop out rates.

Employers and community members are also staying in Coweta County due to the vibrant partnership at the heart of CEC. Fundamental to CEC is a joint venture incorporating the business community, the school system and a technical college. The partnership works because of the level of ongoing commitment from each partner and the motivations of each to be involved. Schools needed additional ways to motivate youth to stay engaged in school and learning and employers needed employees with specialized skills to function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace as well as a strong work ethic. The technical college needed a permanent presence in the county, a significant aspect of fulfilling the community's mission.

Today, the CEC experience is being replicated by other communities in the state of Georgia and hundreds from around the world have come to visit or requested information, interested in educational and economic revitalization of their own. With this level of interest in mind, the Georgia State Department of Education has funded this manual to provide information on how to replicate the CEC experience in your community, whether in Georgia or elsewhere in the country. The manual provides a detailed history of the creation of CEC and explains how to work with partners to rethink educational needs in your community, use a special design and development process called ADDIE, and put in place the replication effort with strategies and practical steps, based on the experience of CEC and other replicating communities.

To envision what the CEC experience could be for your community:

## **Imagine. . .**

### **YOU'RE A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT. . .**

....You choose to enroll in some classes at a new center which offers core high school academics, career and technical courses that fit the needs of local employers, and college courses. The halls are wide, learning is self-paced, and the atmosphere relaxed yet highly challenging. Your classes are taught by enthusiastic instructors who bring applied work experience to their classroom in addition to subject matter knowledge. Your classmates include students from high schools throughout the county as well as adults and technical college students, so there's a higher maturity level in the class. You work on projects, as a member of a team, and gain hands-on work experience using state of the art technical equipment both in school and in on-the-job internships. When you graduate, you'll receive your high school diploma and a technical college certificate in at least one employer-recognized field. Chances are, there will be a well-paying job waiting for you or you will be able to enter college with credits in hand.

### **YOU'RE A TEACHER. . .**

....Your students are motivated and eager to learn. Because of the flexibility you have in instruction, you are able to show students the relevance of your subject matter. You know that their learning is deeper and their retention will be greater, because they see the connection between what they are learning and what they will be doing once they graduate. You are treated as a professional by your administrators and have the respect of the community. Local employers want to partner with you because they recognize you as the critical link between the worlds of education and employment.

### **YOU'RE A PLANT MANAGER. . .**

....The concerns you had about recruitment of new and skilled employees are beginning to recede. You've met with school administrators and explained the challenges you face with respect to a skilled labor market and workforce development, and the administrators not only listened, they acted. Now you're working with high school and technical college instructors to design and develop curriculum, create new courses of study, and offer work-based learning opportunities that will prepare today's students for tomorrow's jobs. Your current employees, many of whom have children of their own in school, respect the commitment their company has made to improving education.

### **YOU'RE A CONCERNED MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY. . .**

....Your youngest child graduated several years ago and had to move to find a decent job. But with new companies relocating to the area, you're hoping she and her husband might be able to move back to town. You've noticed property values are improving and there's a noticeable energy in the air when you shop downtown. You ask your neighbor about her son, who has had problems in school. "Oh, he's developed a real interest in graphic design. He's got an internship with a printing company here in town. He's totally changed since he started at the new school." He always did have talent, you smile to yourself.

***Do you wonder how your community can move from imagining to making this reality?***

This guide will help and the process begins with reconceptualizing education.