

SECTION I: UNDERSTANDING CEC

Why Reconceptualize Education?

The chapters ahead provide detailed instructions on *how to* reconceptualize education in your community. Reconceptualizing education involves looking at education explicitly from the point of view of employers and economic development and changing the educational system to meet the needs of business and industry for qualified employees. Such a change also better meets the needs of high school students in exploring career options, being well-prepared for college, and attaining gainful employment. This chapter explains why you would want to make such a change.

Education as an Engine of Economic Development

Communities are beset by forces seemingly beyond their control that determine whether businesses will stay or leave, whether new employers will arrive, whether citizens will work locally, commute to a larger metropolis, or move away entirely. Communities can allow themselves to be buffeted by these forces that threaten their vitality or they can take control. Economic developers and city planners use a variety of methods to entice employers to stay and to improve the quality of life of their citizens. They might try tax incentives, flexible regulations, or laws requiring employers to hire locally or improve transportation routes. Many approaches are attempts to repair damage already done, once employers begin to leave and after citizens have been forced to take jobs elsewhere.

Coweta County, Georgia, on the other hand, took a proactive approach, recognizing and acting on economic projections and trends, deciding to tackle their economic challenges at their roots. By reconceptualizing their educational system they improved the education and work readiness of their citizens thus enticing employers to stay or relocate within the county and to hire locally. They also engaged young people early on in the economic life of their community by introducing them to employers and showing them their future in the county. Rather than waiting for regional, national, and global competitiveness to take their toll, the county made education a major force in economic development.

In competing for high-skill, high-wage jobs, a key community asset is an available and well-trained workforce. It is becoming increasingly clear that the vitality of communities and opportunities for economic development are inextricably linked to the quality of education and training.

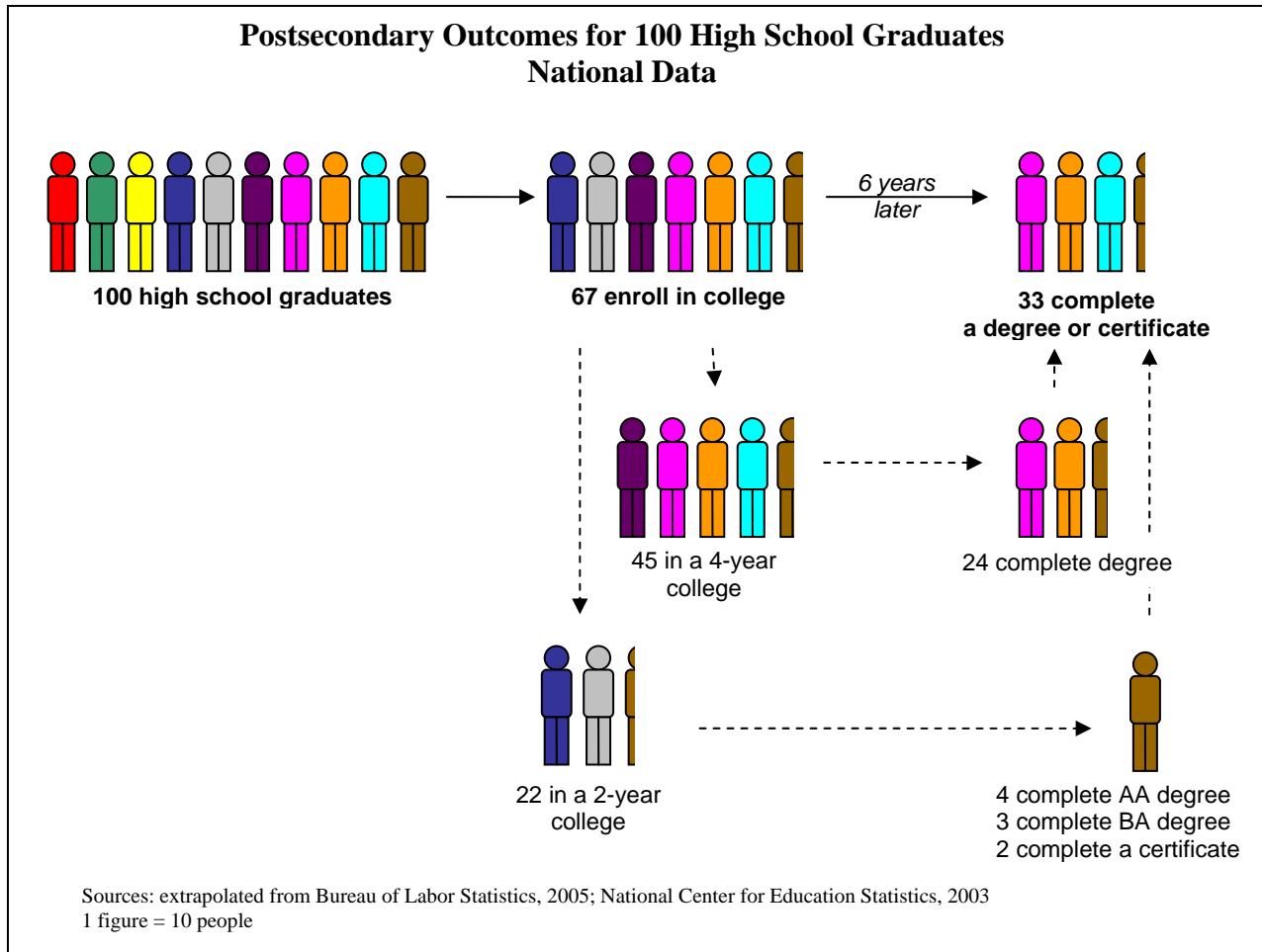
Why Change?

A common concern about secondary education in the U.S. expressed by parents, employers, community leaders, educators, and students themselves is that those graduating from high school are not well prepared for postsecondary education or employment.

The following chart explores this concern by examining national data on the number of young people who complete two- and four-year colleges. It shows that of 100 high school graduates one-third do not attend any type of post-secondary education. (This does not count young people who do not graduate from high school.) Of the 67 who do enroll in post-secondary education, 45 enroll in a four-year college and 22 enroll in a two-year college. A little over half (24) of those in a four-year college complete a degree. Less than half (9) who enroll in a two-year college

receive a degree or certificate. So of the 67 high school graduates going on to some form of postsecondary education, only 33 receive a degree or certificate.

Low college completion rates reveal a lack of preparation in high school. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, only 43 percent of those earning a traditional high school diploma graduate from high school with college-entry skills.¹ Therefore, about 30 percent of college freshmen are required to take one or more remedial courses, with this number jumping to over 60 percent of students at two-year colleges. Students who participate in remediation are less likely to complete their degree.²



This chart on postsecondary outcomes is as significant for what it leaves out as for what it shows:

- high school dropouts (figures vary)
- high school graduates who do not go on to college (33)
- two-year college enrollees who do not graduate (13)
- four-year college enrollees who do not graduate (21)

Thus 67 out of 100 young people who graduate from high school do not complete college or receive a certificate. In addition, high school dropout rates are poorly calculated, and may range from 13-50 percent of young people depending on multiple factors including geography, ethnicity, and income with consequences including underemployment, joblessness, increased use of public assistance, and incarceration.³

One can assume that these 67 youth plus dropouts are not prepared for the workforce. Employers have a hard time finding qualified employees with fundamental skills and an ability to learn. The problem is especially acute among non-college degreed applicants. When employers are asked if young people are prepared to work, the answer is typically 'no.' A diverse group of organizations, from the Department of Labor to the National Association of Manufacturers, have reported that employers feel that most youth lack employability and world of work skills. And students see themselves as unprepared for the workplace. In a survey of Lansing, MI high school graduates, only 17 percent said they were fully prepared for college or employment.⁴ National statistics support these opinions. The highest rates of unemployment are for those 16 to 19 years of age, followed by those 20 to 24.⁵

Of the 33 students who receive some sort of postsecondary education, how many of them are prepared for the workplace? More than those who do not receive some college education. Yet many of them needed remedial education in order to gain their degree or certificate. In addition, nationally, there are increasing numbers of young adults with bachelor's degrees who return to community college for more specific workplace training. Many businesses also hold specialized training programs for their employees at community colleges. These trends speak to the lack of workforce preparedness for both "college-bound" and "non-college bound" young people. Too many young people are unprepared for today's complex work requirements which require more, not less, than a traditional "college-bound" education currently offers.

This national dilemma—a systemic disconnect between education and the modern economy—is also a tremendous opportunity for change. Reversing the above trends, increasing persistence in high school and postsecondary education, increasing achievement levels, and ensuring employment and economic stability are compelling and reachable goals.

Stakeholder Benefits

The tremendous benefits to all major stakeholders of reconceptualized education also build momentum for change. The chart below indicates the varied, yet inter-related, benefits that reconceptualized education can create in any community for parents, students, traditional high schools, career and technical education, technical colleges, economic developers/county planners, and the community at large.

**STAKEHOLDER NEEDS AND THE BENEFITS OF
RECONCEPTUALIZED EDUCATION**

STAKEHOLDERS	CHALLENGES	BENEFITS
<i>Employers</i>	Shortage of qualified employees with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong basic skills • An ability to learn • A 21st century work ethic • Specialized skills to function in a technologically innovative 21st century workplace with global pressures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education based on assessment of employer needs • Curriculum, facility, and equipment geared to meet employer needs, complemented with work-based learning • Qualified employee pool with basic and specialized skills, strong work ethic, high school and college credentials, and an understanding of local needs • Higher levels of employee morale • Increased levels of communication between management and labor • Increased productivity • Reduced recruitment and training costs • Less attrition • Improved corporate image within community⁶
<i>Economic developers and county planners</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential loss of employers • Unwillingness of new employers to locate in community • Insufficient tax base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping and growing existing employers • Attracting new employers • More jobs • Economic growth fueled also by clients and suppliers of new and larger employers • Improving tax base
<i>Secondary Schools</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining motivation of students to learn • Poor attendance • High drop out rates • Poor preparation for college or employment • Need to meet higher state standards and increased graduation requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students gain transferable employability and world of work skills • Students are motivated to learn both academics and workplace skills when the learning is hands-on and related to actual employer needs • Increased teacher job

		<p>satisfaction, less turn over</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting education to the real world motivates students in all classes • Learning is deeper when it is applied and teachers can be assured that they are preparing their students well for life after high school in both college and the workplace
<i>Career and Technical Education (CTE)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underutilized • Fears that it may preclude college • Historically misused as a last resort for lower achievers • Separated from core high school system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes the most of CTE's facilities, funding, experienced teachers, relevance, and equipment • Makes CTE integral to high school, available and accessible to all • Raises standards
<i>Technical Colleges</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May need more campuses • Need to attract younger students, right out of high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases outreach, campuses • Brings in younger students • Helps technical colleges fulfill their important and explicit role to assist with workforce development
<i>Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower property values • High taxes • Young people leaving community to find jobs ("brain drain") • Large number of residents who commute to jobs outside in other locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher property values • Lower taxes (shared more broadly) • Young people stay • New residents are attracted • Better jobs • Better schools • A sense of civic pride • Enhanced quality of life • Economic vitality
<i>Parents</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discouraged that their children do not like school and are not achieving at desired levels • Want their children to stay in schools, get good jobs, become self-sufficient, and be able to stay in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children stay in school, are motivated to learn, are prepared for college and the workplace, and become self-sufficient • Children can stay in local community, work and raise their families comfortably
<i>Students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmotivated • Not learning much • Poor attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivated to learn • Stay in school • Achieve academically at

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dropping out • See no relationship between school and the “real world” 	<p>higher levels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to participate in the global economy as world-class workers and citizens while remaining in their local community • See connections between school and the world
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Evaluations of reconceptualized education have shown the types of benefits indicated above. For local industry, improving education and training can prove more enticing than tax breaks or other incentives. In Coweta County, a major employer, Yamaha, declined offers to relocate once CEC offered to establish a lab that would train students in advanced manufacturing skills, guaranteeing Yamaha an affordable way to recruit and train its own workforce locally. In fact, the company decided to build a \$40 million expansion and create an additional 300 jobs for an initial local economic impact of \$75 million.

In research tracking the educational and career trajectories of high school students, participants in high-quality school-to-career programs, in contrast to their non-participating peers, tend to pursue and persist in postsecondary education at higher rates; maintain good grades; report having been better prepared for the transition to college and employment; take more tangible steps toward achieving their career goals; and report earning higher wages.⁷ In Coweta County, since the implementation of CEC, students have taken advantage of more systematic transitions to college and the workplace, increased aspirations to attend college, and developed a stronger 21st century work ethic.

To put it simply, by reconceptualizing education, everybody wins.

Endnotes

¹ Robert McCabe. (2000). *No One to Waste: A Report to Public Decision-Makers and Community College Leaders*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.

² National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). *The Condition of Education*. Washington, DC: Author.

³ Martin, N., & Halperin, S. (2006). *Whatever It Takes: How Twelve Communities Are Reconnecting Out-of-School Youth*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.

⁴ Fritts, J. and Tomlanovich, A. (2001) *Words to the Wise: Advice to Students, Teachers, and Administrators from Recent High School Graduates*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development.

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey 2004.

⁶ See MacAllum, K., and Charner, I. (2000) *Beyond the Success of Students*. Washington, DC: Academy of Educational Development.

⁷ See MacAllum, K., et al. (2002) *Moving Forward: College and Career Transitions of LAMP Graduates*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development;

Bozick, R. and MacAllum, K. (2002) “Does Participation in School-to-Career Limit Students’ Educational and Career Options?” *Journal of Career and Technical Education*. Vol. 18, No. 2; and
Akukwe, G. et al. “Assessing the Quality of Career and Technical Education Transition Programs.” Presentation at the Association for Career and Technical Education Annual Convention 2004.

Also Used

MacAllum, K. and Johnson A. B. *Reconceptualizing Education as an Engine of Economic Development: A Case Study of the Central Educational Center*. 2004 Biennial Research Conference Compilation, US Department of Labor, Washington, DC: Spring 2004.