

# **Building the Next Workforce: Making Choices for Your Community**

**Southern Growth Policies Board Workforce Forum  
February, 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

**Midland Workforce Development Board<sup>4</sup>  
and Clemson Institute for Community and Economic  
Development**

**Information Prepared by**

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## **Introduction**

The information provided here is the outcome of a forum concerning workforce development held at the Clemson University Sandhill Recreation and Education Center in Columbia, South Carolina on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007. The forum was jointly sponsored by the Midland Workforce Development Board and by the Clemson Institute for Economic and Community Development. The forum resulted from an effort of the Southern Growth Policies Board (SGPB) concerning ways and barriers to building the next workforce. As part of the information generation process, the SGPB helped sponsor numerous forums throughout the South that provide a venue for examining these issues. (For more information, visit the SGPB website at [www.southern.org/forums.shtml](http://www.southern.org/forums.shtml).)

Questions and moderator guide were provided by the SGPB including approaches to be used in examining the three major areas of emphasis listed as follows: 1) educational achievement, 2) focus on serving industry, and 3) focus on workforce traits.

### **Questions Summarizing Forum Discussions (provided by SGPB)**

#### **1. What key concerns about workforce development emerged form the discussion?**

Educational achievement is limited by poverty and loss of the nuclear family. Resulting social ills hamper the ability of many local school systems to meet educational needs. The lack of parental involvement and ways to reinforce or substitute for such involvement was a significant part of the discussion. A related issue is the lack of soft skills for many new workers coming out of the education system. Policies that can be used to motivate at-risk students, such as high school technology centers, are only available at a few selected schools while vocational education programs have been reduced or eliminated elsewhere.

#### **2. Was there a shared sense of the future direction the community should take?**

There was much agreement that soft skills are important and that the education system is not doing a good job of teaching these and that such efforts such be enhanced. These activities could look at including business shadowing programs and activities by organizations that provide youth with positive after school opportunities.

Joint school system and industry programs that have been started in the area are beginning to have a real impact. These programs need to continue to progress and also need to be replicated throughout South Carolina. Case study research could be used to inform and support these efforts.

#### **3. What areas of disagreement, if any?**

How to best balance the need for technical skills and soft skills.

A business-based elite driving workforce development goals versus broader business community involvement.

**4. Did the group identify possible actions or next steps? Please describe.**

There is a need to devote more resources toward the interface between workforce development and the education system. Especially in terms of 1) technology centers that reach at-risk youth and 2) programs that teach youth entrepreneurship.

Students need to learn independent thinking while mathematics and science curriculum need to be enhanced.

**5. What unique information came out of the forum that our leaders need to know?**

Programs that reinforce appropriate soft (life) skills and entrepreneurship are critical needs. While results from the post-forum questionnaire indicated participants supported both types of activities, the need to teach entrepreneurship in the K-12 school system was seen as been important by virtually all forum participants.

**6. Briefly describe the participants (age, ethnic diversity, educational levels).**

A mix of male and female, larger middle age, but several younger individuals; several Afro-Americans but only one Hispanic. Participants were all well educated and well spoken. The education-training system was very well represented while only two business owners were present.

**Group Flip-chart Comments  
(In Bold Moderator Topic Areas)**

**Approach #1: Focus on Education Achievement**

- Kids dropping out of school
- Single-parent families, world challenging more, so % relative to drop-out rate, no place for them to go, a problem from 1960's-till present
- Problem students being forced out by the system
- Standardized tests drive school performance and those who are not driven have low scores
- Zero-tolerance policy
- Poverty key issue-kids need to work
- Dealing with the technology advanced student; they are often bored
- Income equals performance in schools
- Economic Impact
- Stress on social agencies
- Tax base

- Gangs
- Generational issue-impact-chain reaction
- No jobs-turn to life of crime
- Impacts standard of living of wealthy
- Lack of vocational opportunity
- Goal: Drop-out rate reduced by 50%
- Demonstrate trainable workforce can be trained relevant to industry
- Positive academic reform
- More employed/fewer gangs, better tax base
- Post-secondary Education: 40+% aspire to higher education/ but only 25% of jobs are for higher education graduates
- Disconnect /industry/job force
- If H.S. is completed good chance students will continue with education
- Make education affordable-BIG FACTOR
- Major university raising standards
- In-state SC State left behind
- Lower out-of-state tuition costs to attract star students
- Students will live their lives there go to school; example Columbia.
- Children/Daycare/Family/Issue
- Language a barrier? Tools to provide that education
- Students-preparation/education. SC does that very well-few just a few cases-locations (such as Midlands)
- Adult education/Pell Grant-promote
- Is post/secondary for everyone?
  - Specialization or high school diploma-still good jobs
  - Disabled, perhaps not
  - May not mean a degree, but specialization/training
  - Continuous learning skills-something to fall back on-transition
- “Why” is education important-people find out too late-too old-their financial commitments then prevent their obtaining an education.
- Value-instill educational values in home
- Net (Safety) keeps them from achieving-no resources in HS-done from start
- Level playing field in education system-legislation needs to change
- Etiquette/jobs/communication skills need to be taught/interviews
- Parents not at home/raised by other family members

## **Approach #2: Industry**

- EDA-moving forward-4 years aligning school districts/curriculum with industry (early stages) comment
- W/A- Focus on employer customer (and job seeker)
- Help-soft skills-recruit
  - Entry level can be done as quick fix
  - Upgrading skills of existing folks-offer new opportunities
- More tools to identify skills-enhance process
- Middle college success (Employees that can think)
- Promote-creative thinking-transferable skills-transition
- Once (participant) in the curriculum leads to a career path example: for nurses LPN training to become RN)
- Motivation- not driven-lacking social skills-parents' job to instill the motivation
- Learning circle-fear-drives performance
- Creativity not encouraged in schools-different types of intelligence drive/restricted environment
- Identify pupil's direction/skills-adapt curriculum
- Role model-outsider-inspire direction
- VO-tech tours/past/ job shadowing; Some programs-elected
- Career exploration program
- Career interest inventory
- Schools know problem with VO-Tech curriculum elimination
- How schools reward principal, etc. tells priorities-guidance councilors work with the very top students 1/660-1/300, 1/150 (best)

### **Approach #3: Workforce Traits**

- Skill to work-#1 issue for employers-can teach skills of jobs-can overcome being a dropout
- Desire-can we teach that?
- Want tech skills/soft-employers want
- K-12 does not teach soft skills: Why? Beholden to test scores-no time
- School system Teamwork being lost-cycle has to break
- Recess/etc. no opportunity-school change
- Break cycles in families
- TANF programs-welfare program
- Secular youth programs

- Youth Clubs/Church affiliated (Do not reach lower socio-economic kids, except for some youth clubs)
- Individual interest
- Rural kids-opportunities
- Peer pressure to not join these clubs-not cool/gangs
- Parents understand opportunities?
- Parent investment
- Dysfunction in all socio/economic levels
- Individuals/parents have to have big change/crisis to address parental investment
- Schools/parent sessions/employees-employers policy-(“Your child is #1”)-Career Carnival /children and parent-shows future to both struggling programs  
Grandparents, no interest in child’s career path-late 50’s still working
- Parents working-no time. The people that need to attend do not.

### **Entrepreneurs**

- Is now an elective
- Entrepreneurial attitudes not developed
- Student get up and go is needed
- Foster business incubator-show programs, examples. Many don’t know that such opportunity exists.
- Need risk taking attitude.
- Business training needed. Some of this needs to be specialized, for example “How do you get patent?”

### **Conclusion**

- Pool of resources
- Resource issue
- Dollars into technical centers
- Solutions has elements of all three approaches
- Teach independent thinking (common thread)
- Math and science more!!
- Create employee/jobs
- Network/collaboration
- Agencies/communication
- Educators – employers
- Communication-key
- Importance of knowledge taught to families/kids

- Mentorship/teach motivation
- “District” snob issue-no mechanic schools-stigma
- K-12: top five and bottom 5% get most of the attention

**What are you willing to do as /community/group?**

- Business partners in 16 clusters-every school has access online-process in place
- Success story /online/reward
- Spotlight those that may be left behind
- Listen to employers/students want measurements/not need
- Reinforce new ideas
- Isolated cases-good job
- Systemic attempts fails (ref. opportunity schools)
- Career exploration/implement, on smaller scale, might work
- What do we do in the meantime when services not provided? In ten years will change be felt?

**Group Reflection**

**Move towards what?**

**Next step?**

**Do we meet again? Explore.**

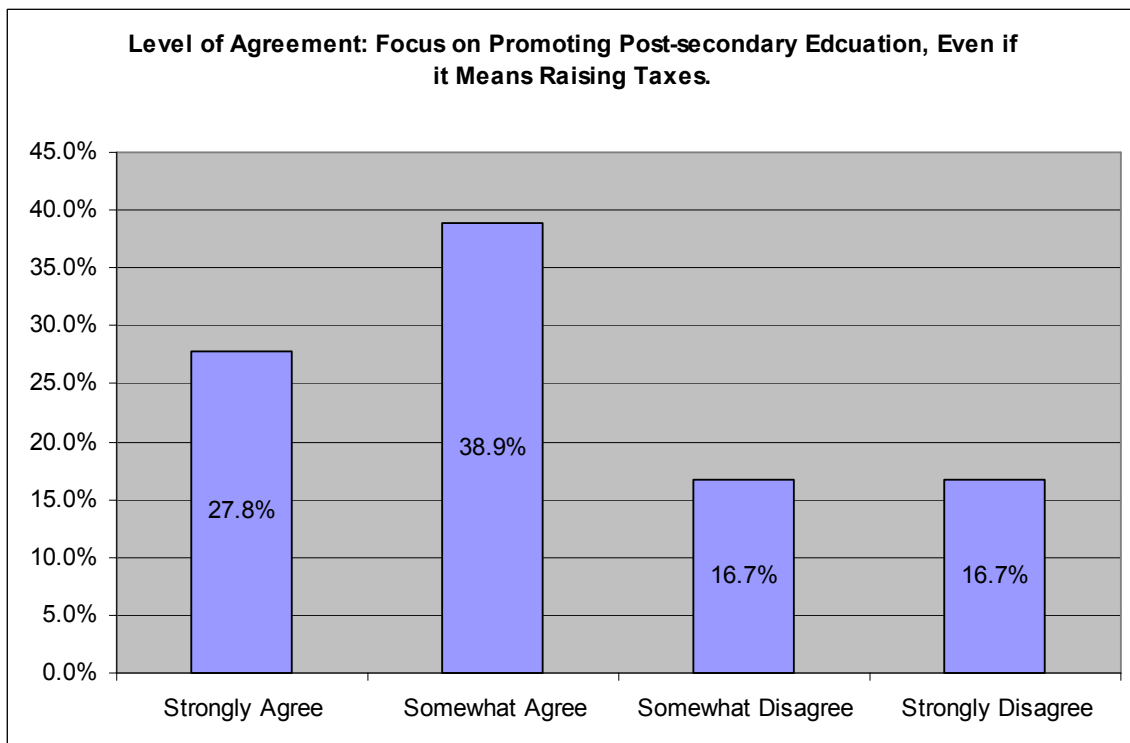
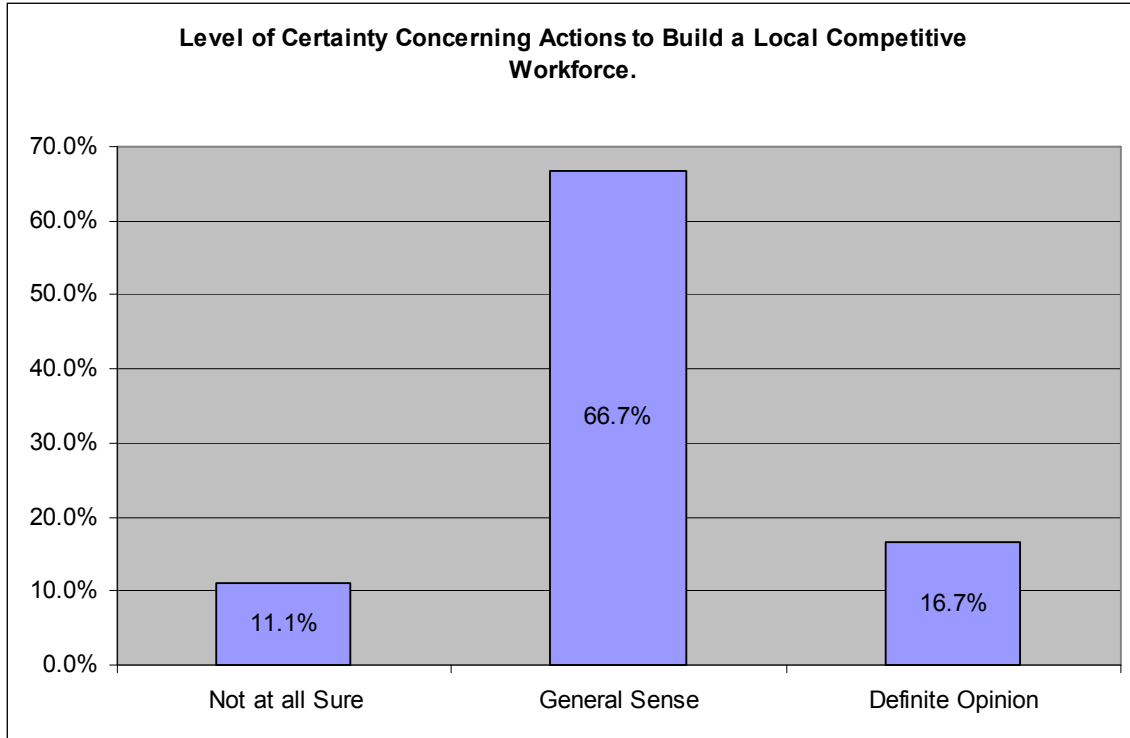
**Who is missing from the table?**

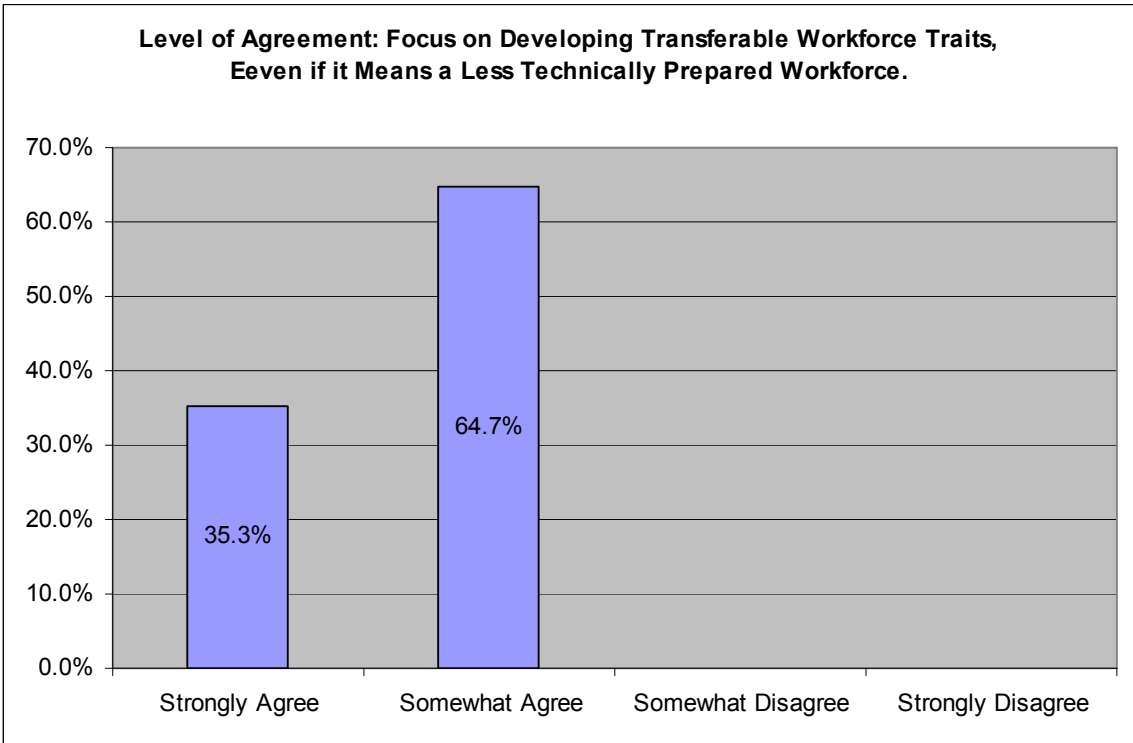
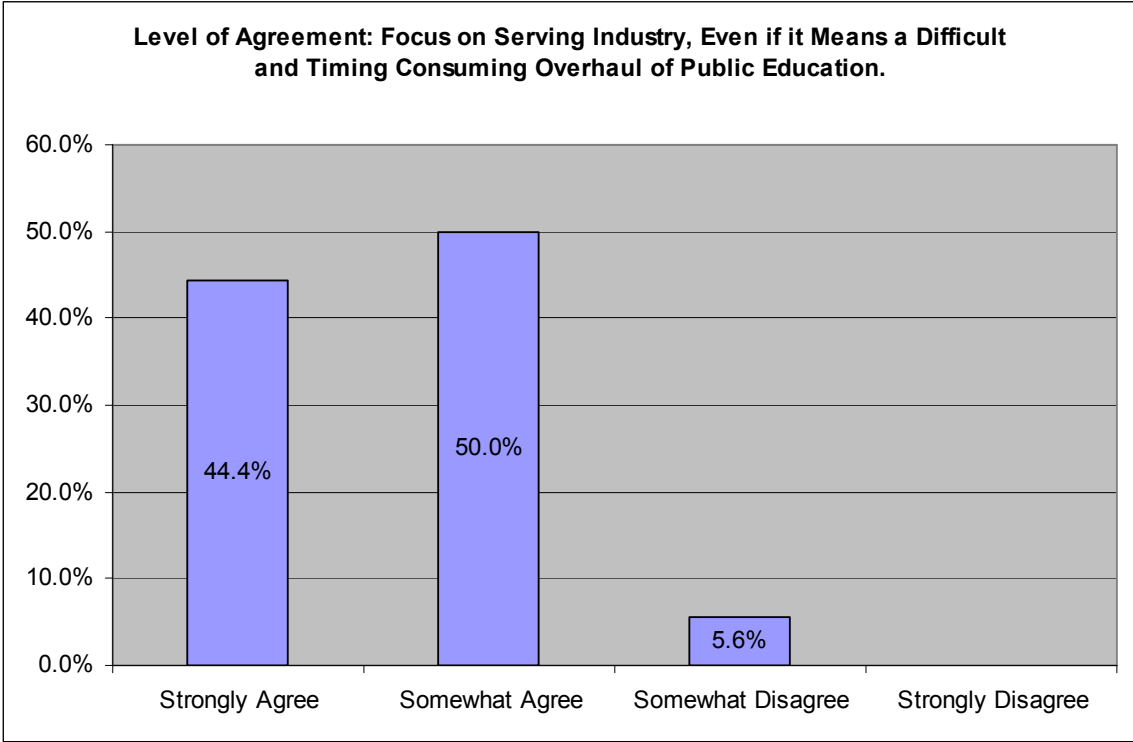
- Only local level involvement can and will get things done.
- Infrastructure problems-rural schools
- Other participants: Educators, Business Human Resource Directors
- Look at invisible unemployment (no longer seeking employment)
- Flourishing-creative
- Work keys-examine successes-best practices-tout-success

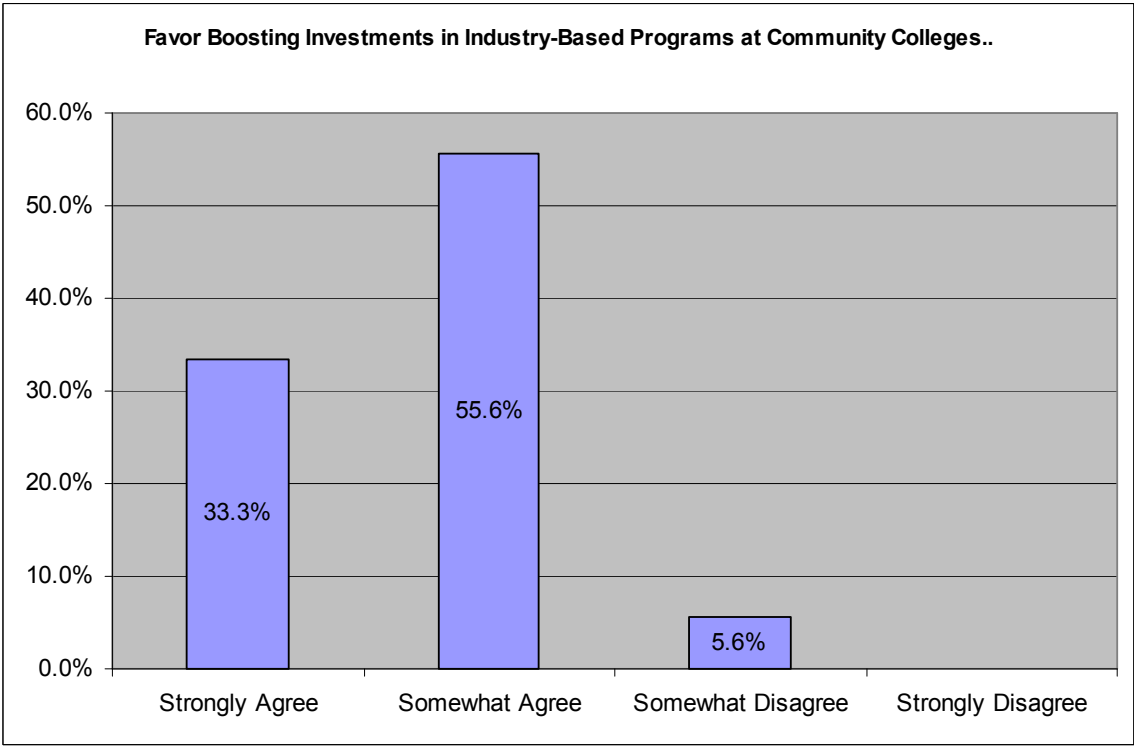
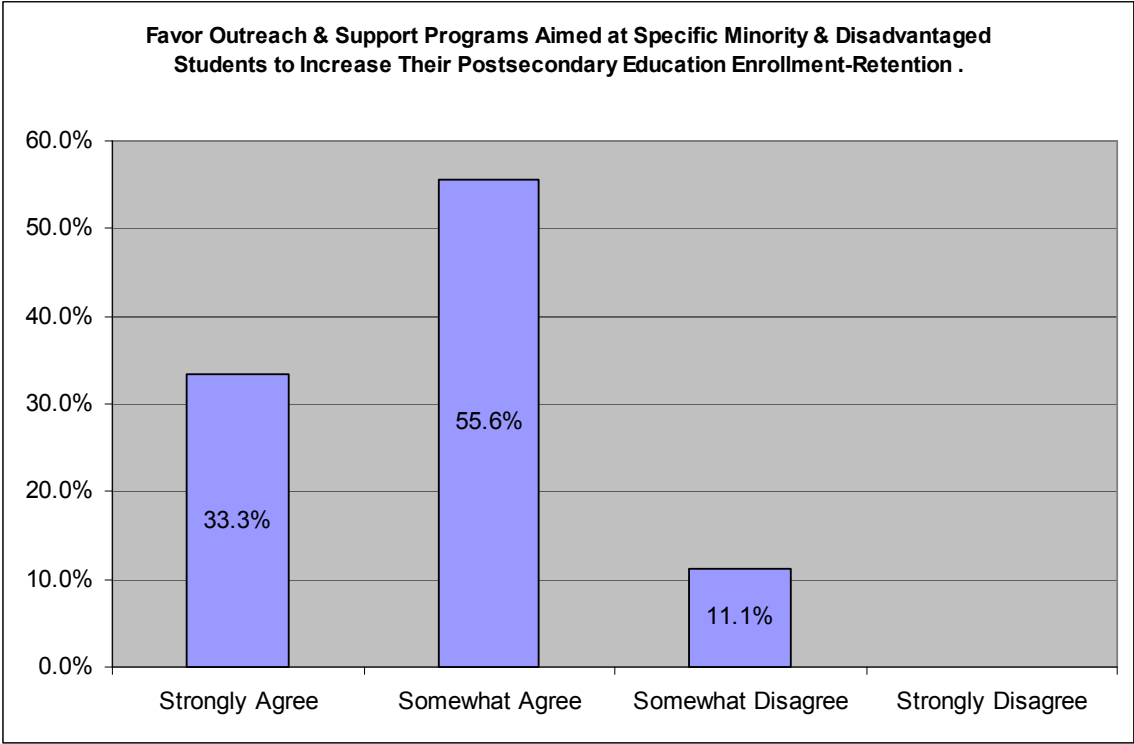
**Areas of Research Need**

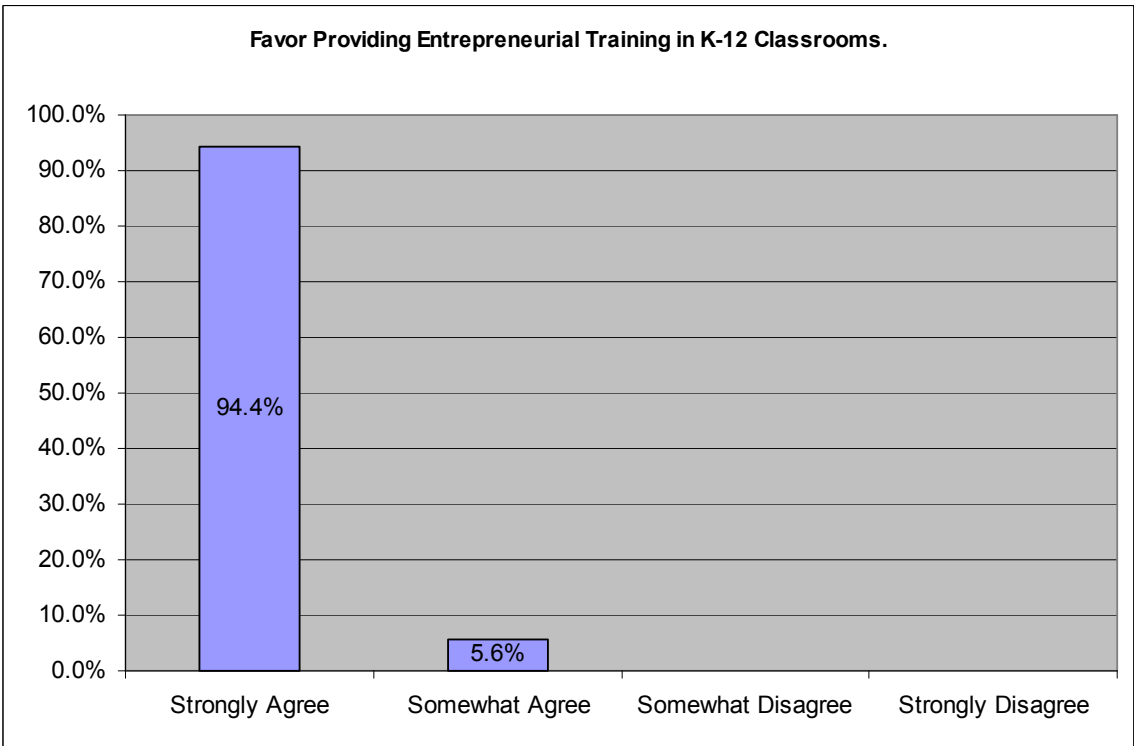
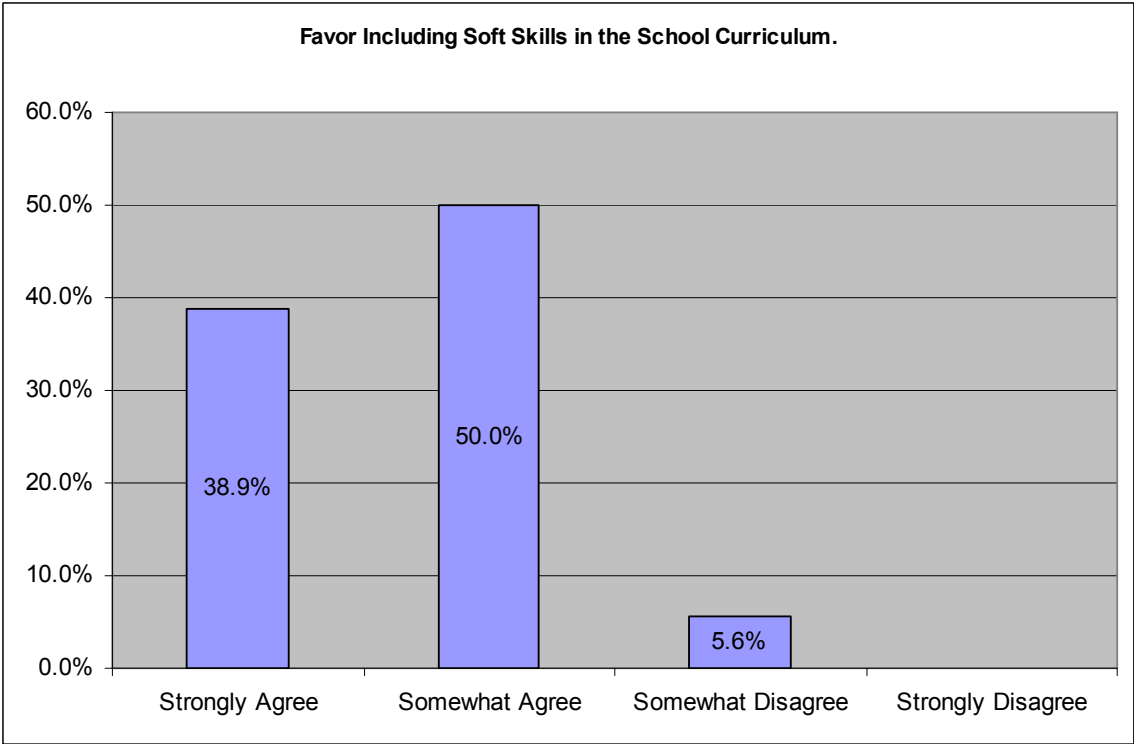
- Point of light replication
- Size is critical
- Case studies
- Entrepreneurship
- Youth initiatives modeling
- Work keys in the high school (KY/Tenn.) now done
- Career Readiness Certification
- At risk student/studies

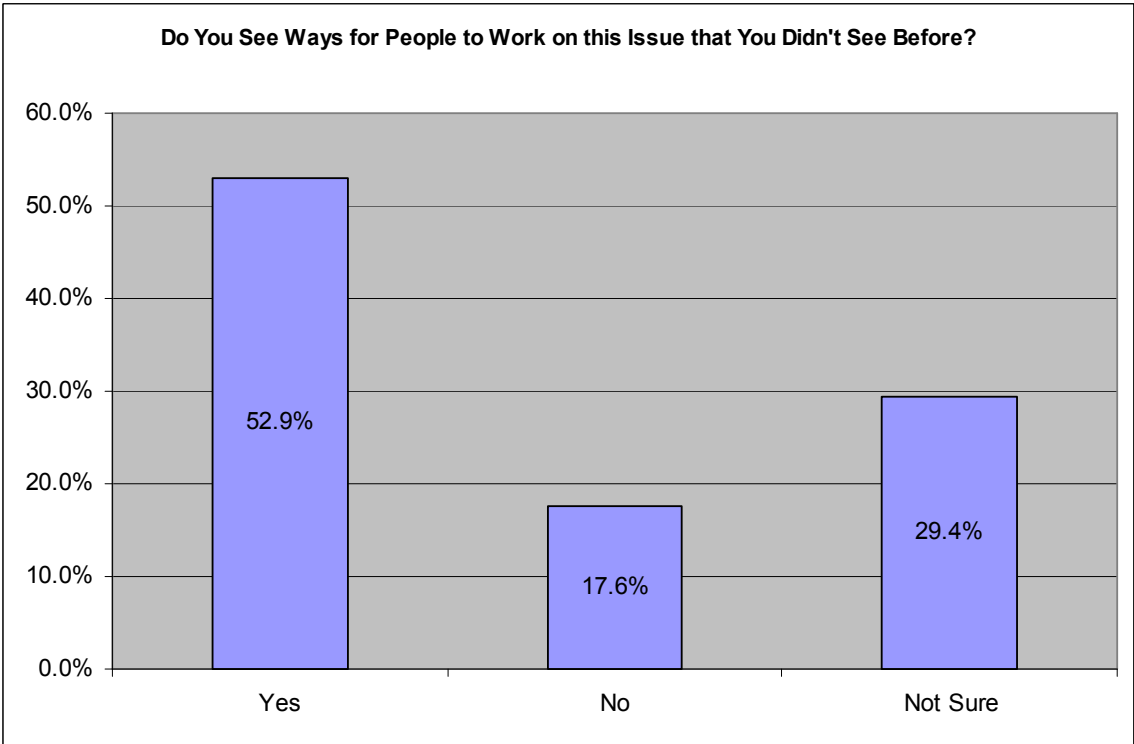
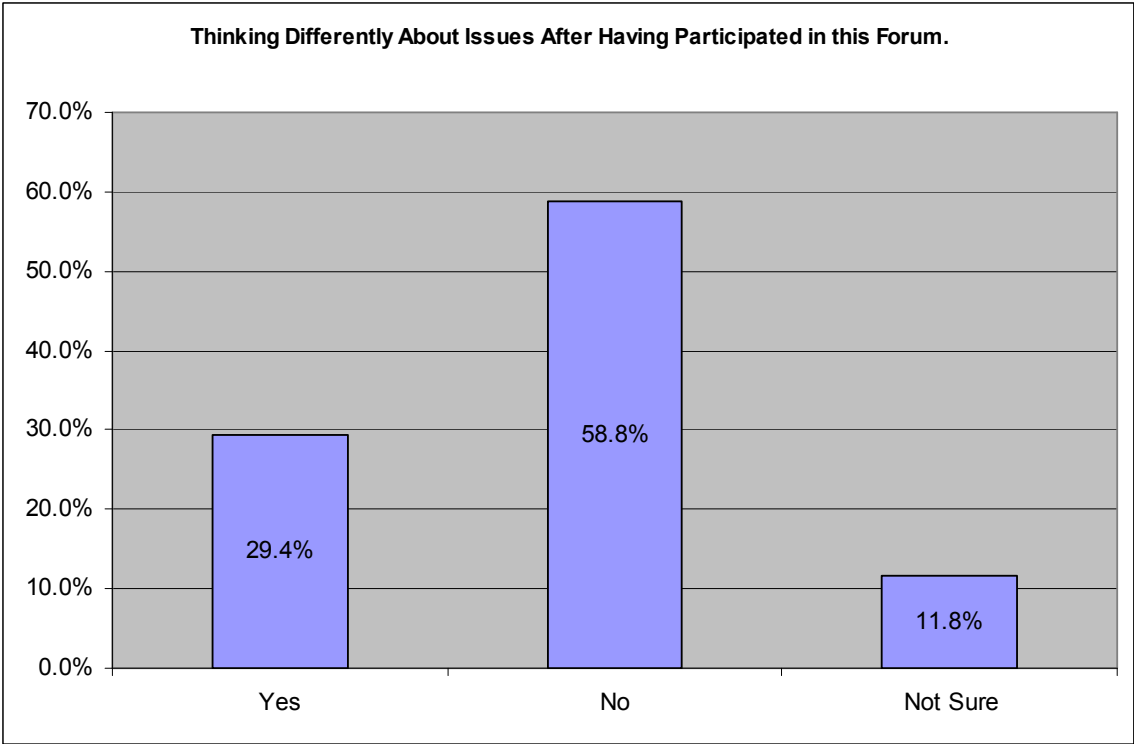
### Results of Post-Forum Questionnaire (Provided by SGPB)











**Written Comments:**

**Q. Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum, if yes, please explain.**

Things are worse than I realized.

Many efforts, such as entrepreneurial education in k-12 system, are already being done.

The need is more dire than I realized.

This has re-invigorated my consideration of systematic solutions to workforce issues.

**Q. Do you see ways for people to work on this issue that you didn't see before? Please explain.**

Identify what's working and build on that.

Other focus groups (HR, legislators, and employment agencies) should be a part of the solution.

More opportunities for corporations.

Enlightenment.

Working relationships.

It will require teamwork and collaboration beyond what we are doing, now.

**Q. What, if anything, might you do differently as a result of this forum?**

Continue to be involved.

Support education.

**Q. What else, if anything, troubles you about the challenges of workforce development? Please explain.**

It's a long-term, uphill effort.

A less educated and prepared workforce impacts all of us.

That we will be working on a warped canvas until the public education changes their objectives and standards.

An elite small group of employers are driving the workforce development train and an increase in employers are deserved- Change education.

Financial.

Lack of family involvement.

Moderator Summary Sheet

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**Date of Forum** 2/27/2007 **Number of Participants** 17

**Location of Forum** Columbia (City) SC (State)